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IMITATIO CHRISTI

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WHEATLEY





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Edited by

Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A.



THOMAS À KEMPIS.

Photographed from the portrait at Geertruidenberg

THE STORY
OF THE
"IMITATIO CHRISTI"

BY
LEONARD A. WHEATLEY

LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW

1891

THE STORY
OF THE
"IMITATIO CHRISTI"

BV4829
W5

TO MARY
AUGUST 1910

P R E F A C E.

 *In the original scheme of the Book-Lover's Library it was proposed to devote certain volumes to the history of books of world-wide fame. After the Bible no book has been so much read or enjoyed so extended a fame, as "The Imitation of Christ" of Thomas à Kempis, and it therefore seems specially appropriate to commence this branch of the series with an account of this famous work.*

The late Mr. Edward Waterton, who from his great knowledge of the subject was eminently fitted for the task, undertook to write "The Story of the Imitation."

He had collected some MSS. and numerous editions of the work, and had already written a Life of Thomas à Kempis, as well as several letters in defence of this author. He, however, died before he was able to accomplish the task. I was then asked to take up the subject, and as I had already devoted some attention to it, I gladly agreed to the suggestion. I have endeavoured to write in the same spirit as Mr. Waterton had done, and to aid in the cause he had so much at heart; to show as plainly as I can how the four treatises now known under the name of "The Imitation of Christ" had their origin in the "Rapiaria," or books of extracts recommended by Gerard Groot to his followers the Brethren of Common Life, and how the forms of expression in this work betray its origin in this*

* Articles in *Bibliographer*, May 1884, and in *Scottish Review*, July 1885.

community, and also the land of its birth; and how the majority of the MSS. of the editions and translations confirm this opinion.

I have also tried to trace the mysticism to be found in "The Imitation" from that in the German mystics who preceded Thomas à Kempis, as also the more practical ideas from the works of his friends and contemporaries.

I am largely indebted to those who have spent much labour on this subject, especially to Rev. S. Kettlewell, whose valuable works first stirred in me the love of the author, and afforded much help, especially in those chapters relating to the "Brothers of Common Life," and to "Thomas à Kempis;" to Dr. Cruise, not only for his published work, but for his kind sympathy and friendly help; as also to the works of Canon Santini and Father Becker.

I wish to express my great obligations to Rev. Provost Murray of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for information regarding the MS. in the Library of that College; to Professor Robertson Smith, for a note on the MS. in the University Library, Cambridge; to F. Madan, Esq., Sub-Librarian of the Bodleian Library, for an account of the various MSS. in Oxford; and also to Dr. Ingram, of Dublin, for various readings in the Dublin and Cambridge MSS. of the first English translation.

There are several portraits of Thomas à Kempis, which prove that when alive his fame was widely extended. In them he is represented either in his cell or in the open air in the grounds of Mount St. Agnes. One of the former has been engraved, but it would not bear reduction to suit this volume. Of the latter there are two oil paintings in Holland, one at

Zwolle, which is unfortunately much decayed, and another at Gertruidenberg, which is in good preservation. It belongs to Pastor Allard of that town, and is evidently genuine. By the kindness of Dr. Cruise we have been enabled to secure a negative of this portrait, which forms the frontispiece of the volume.

While this work has been in progress we have had to lament the death of two of the most accomplished defenders of the rights of Thomas, Canon Spitzen and Mons. Ruelens the obliging and accomplished keeper of the Burgundian Library at Brussels. May their labours not be in vain; and may this little volume be the means of furthering the same cause, and help to settle the claims of Thomas à Kempis to be the true author of "The Imitation of Christ."

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UNIV. OF

CALIFORNIA



THE STORY
OF THE
“IMITATIO CHRISTI.”



CHAPTER I.

ACCOUNT OF THE BOOK.

“Man’s real progress is in self-denial.”
Imit. III. 39.

N the beginning of the fifteenth century four little treatises were composed in a monastery in Holland, which were valued so highly that copy after copy was made, first among the Brothers of the Common Life, then among the monasteries in fellowship with them, and lastly over the whole Continent.

What was there in these little treatises —to which were given the names of *The Imitation of Christ*, *Musica Ecclesiastica*, or

2
AMONG MONKS
The Story of

Book of Internal Consolation—that should have made them spread so rapidly, and meet with so many readers from that day until now?

There must have been something that appealed at once to the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men; for though these treatises were primarily written for the monastery, they have been also a solace to those in the world. The first thing that strikes one in them is the great simplicity of thought and of style, called by Lamennais *celestial*: “the union of pregnant brevity with the purest sentiment” has obtained for the author, according to Dibdin, the title of the *Tacitus of Monasticism*. And the second is shown when he adds, “One peculiarity is the minute and severe scrutiny of the human heart.” This last idea is also expressed by the author of the *German Theology* thus: “The fundamental principle of the work is the annihilation of selfishness (the sin of Adam) through Christ, bringing therewith peace, heaven, and blessedness.” Herein is contained the essence of Christianity, for, as Wesley says, “The whole treatise is a complete and finished work, comprehending all that relates to Christian perfection and the principles of that internal worship with

which we alone worship God in spirit and in truth." The work seems to take it for granted that we know the right way, and gently admonishes us to walk in it. It dwells on the spirit, and not on the mere letter of the commandment.

Though generally known as *The Imitation of Christ*, there is in the book no account of that life; but there is the spirit that moved that life, there are the words given and the precepts enjoined that should pervade the life of the Christian. It appeals to all to make their will submissive to the Divine will, and to seek that love of God in possessing which we attain to that peace which passeth understanding. Another attraction is the quotation therein of so many passages from Scripture, forming, as De Quincey says,* "slender rivulets of truth silently stealing away into light."

It is as Brother Azarias, in his *Culture of the Spiritual Sense*,† says, the author "has garnered a few of the lessons revealed in the Gospels, and bound them together in rich and ripe sheaves of thought." From having written out the Bible, and carefully studied it in his cell, the mind of the author was so pervaded

* *Works*, 1862, vol. i., p. vi.

† Quoted by Dr. Cruise in his *Thomas à Kempis*.

with Scripture, that passages from the Old and New Testaments constantly occur to him as suitable to his purpose, and their appropriateness gives a charm to the work.

Another attraction the book possesses is its power of raising us above the world and its troubles, and of bringing us into communion with God. George Eliot has well expressed this charm in showing the soothing effect of this work on poor Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*; and this charm is felt by learned and unlearned alike. The unlearned find words that soothe their mind; the learned not only find these, but also reminiscences which lead to suggestions and to fresh trains of thought. Both can appreciate that higher mysticism which unites the creature with the Creator that runs through the work, advocating simplicity. It does not deprecate learning, but shows how vain a thing it is without purity of heart and simplicity of mind.

Canon Liddon, in his preface to the rhythmic translation of the *Imitation*, speaks of its success as "it takes the moral teaching of our Lord in the Gospels as a rule of thought, feeling, and action." While this is true in a great measure, we cannot help thinking the charm principally

consists in the manner in which this teaching is expressed. The work abounds in that charity which makes the teaching acceptable to Christians of all denominations, and which causes it to be appreciated even by those who do not bear that name; since no one can fail to perceive, from the conviction and sincerity of the author in his own counsels, that he himself has followed them, and been comforted by them. Brother Accarias well expresses the secret of the magic influence wielded by the *Imitation*. "Pick it up when and where we may, open it at any page we will, we always find something to suit our frame of mind. . . . In every sentence we find condensed the experience of ages. It is humanity finding in this simple man an adequate mouthpiece for the utterance of its spiritual wants and soul yearnings. And his expression is so full and adequate because he regarded things in the white light of God's truth, and saw their nature and their worth clearly and distinctly, as divested of the hues and tints flung around them by passion and illusion."

The first treatise, the title to which has been applied to the whole four, consists of "Admonitions Useful to a Spiritual Life." It shows us how to despise the

vanities of the world, how to avoid pride, and how to appreciate the advantages of obedience, of adversity, and of solitude. Its object is to raise us above the world and lead us to Christ.

The second, "Admonitions drawing us to the Inner Life," dwells on the life to be led by a Christian,—"Why do ye seek rest since ye are born to labour?" "Dispose yourself to patience rather than to comforts, and to bear the cross rather than to rejoice,"*—and on that inner life by which one is able to attain such a frame of mind that one feels that "no one is richer, more powerful, or freer than he who can renounce all and set himself in the lowest place." †

The treatise known to us as the fourth book seems to have been intended by Thomas à Kempis to come after the second, it being so placed in his own copy ; for after fitting ourselves, by the study of the first two books, to appreciate the life of a Christian, we are able to understand the benefits of the Holy Eucharist, to which subject this book is an exhortation. It commences with the Voice of Christ saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," etc.; followed by the

* II. 10.

† II. 11.

voice of the disciple on the reverence with which Christ is to be received, on the great goodness and love of God shown to man in this Sacrament, on the utility of frequent communion, on the good received by the devout communicant, on the dignity of the sacrament, and on the proper preparation for receiving it.

The fourth treatise, or, as we generally know it, the third book of the *Imitation*, is of the nature of a distinct work, and longer than the others. It is entitled "The Book of Inward Consolation," for it treats of that true consolation to be obtained by the believer. We here see the contrast between the natural man and the man influenced by the grace of God, and the effect of true love in the heart, as in the following passage from the fifth chapter :—

"Love is a great thing,
A blessing very good,
The only thing that makes all burdens light,
Rearing evenly what is uneven,
Carrying a weight, not feeling it,
Turning all bitterness to a sweet savour.
The noble love of Jesus drives men on to do
great deeds,
And always rouses them to long for what is
better.
Love would be lifted up,
Not held by anything of earth.
It would be free.
* * * * *

Nothing is sweeter, stronger, broader, higher,
Fuller, better, or more pleasant in the heaven
or earth.

It is the child of God,
Nor can it rest except in Him
Above the world created.

* * * * *

Love is swift, sincere,
Pious, pleasant, and delightsome,
Brave, patient, faithful,
Careful, long-suffering, manly,
Never seeking its own good ;
For where a man looks for himself
He falls away from love.” *

The *Imitation* is one of those books which seem destined never to die ; its popularity increases rather than decreases, and there is every reason for it to be appreciated now more than ever before. It is said that we did not learn the lesson of tolerance until the reign of William III., and it is at least certain that never has this great Christian virtue of charity been so universal as it is at the present time. However, its true spirit pervades this work throughout. How beautifully does Thomas speak of it in the passage just quoted, and not only here, but in his other works. In the *Garden of Roses* (chap. xiii.) he writes : “ Charity is a noble virtue, which is above all virtues, all knowledge, and all gifts.

* This translation is taken from the *Imitation* in rhythmic sentences published by Elliot Stock.

It makes just men of sinners, free men of slaves, friends of enemies, citizens of strangers, humble ones of the proud, joyful of the sad, heavenly of the earthly, and wise of the unlearned. . . . As fire consumes the wood, so does charity extinguish vices."

Such was the doctrine Thomas taught, and such doctrine he acted up to in his whole life ; so much so that his name was always held in honour by all the brethren of the various communities who knew him.

Besides charity he possessed its natural concomitant, unselfishness ; and we cannot understand how Dean Milman and Archdeacon Farrar, both admirers of the *Imitation*, can accuse this work of advocating a religion of selfishness. If this were the case one might accuse all religion of selfishness, as we must be religious ourselves before we can impress its benefits on others. While the former simply states his objection to the work as teaching selfishness, the latter says that it is as though it were "without one flower of duty to blossom unscorched beside the path of life." Something to the same effect writes Dr. Sepp, a learned German, author of a *Life of Christ* and other works, who complains of the book being Budd-

histic. These accusations might be true if we were to rely on single passages where we are told of the benefits of religion to ourselves, and in which these benefits are pointed out as reasons for our doing good ; but taken as a whole they are untenable. Do we not find there such passages as, " Be always doing good," " Your works are of no avail without charity," " To do the will of God and *the good of our neighbour*" ? Is that self-absorption ? And we might quote, to prove that it is not so, many similar passages. The book is certainly not infallible, and there are sentences which seem to teach that if we suffer in this world we shall be free from suffering in the world to come, while if we do not suffer here we shall have it in abundance hereafter ; a doctrine which might have been held by the ascetics in the early Church, but which is certainly not in accordance with the teaching of to-day. There are also passages which are not in conformity with Protestant views, but these passages are so few that they may be considered like spots in the sun, detracting but little from the value of the work. Augustine has said, " The chief end of the Christian religion is to imitate Him whom you worship." St. Bernard says, " You will learn Christ better by

following Him than by reading of Him"; and this is the following of Christ as advocated in the *Imitation*.

The advice given is often useful in a worldly as well as in a spiritual sense. Such maxims as, "Of two evils choose the least," "Learn to conquer yourself in many things, if you wish to live in peace and concord," are thoroughly practical ones; and the essential truth contained in such as, "No one rejoices securely unless he bears in himself the witness of a good conscience," or "There is no true liberty nor real joy except in the fear of God with a good conscience," cannot be denied.

Busken-Huet, in his work on *The Land of Rembrandt*, speaks of three ways in which Christian mysticism asserted itself in the Middle Ages. One direction, he says, was taken by those who wished to be independent of Church dogma and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and this was the way taken by the movements of the Albigenses and of the Waldenses which were crushed by Innocent III.

A second was solely in pursuit of political objects, and resulted in the movements of Wat Tyler, of Jack Cade, and of the Hussites.

The *Imitation* is the outcome of the

third direction, which was at first limited to the cloister and to the individual man, but which is "the fruit of a view of life which in the course of time produced the Jesuits among the Roman Catholics and the Moravian Brethren among the Protestants."

Taken from this point of view, the *Imitation* may be classed among the works of the mystics; but what is mysticism? It may be considered as that philosophy the aim of which is to unite the soul of man to God, and which often reckons the spiritual part of man as a part of the Deity. Thomas à Kempis resembles the other mystics in showing the necessity of the soul dying to the world and to itself, and rising again to God, as he has done in the *Imitation* and in his other works; but he differs from them by avoiding the feebleness of fancy in Pantheism or Quietism, faults into which many of them have fallen. The contemplation he recommends does not unfit man for work, work being strongly insisted on.

In Christian mysticism God is considered the type of all perfection and all grace, and must be sought for by love alone, and not by knowledge. In the *Imitation* we are told to seek God also by love, but we are not taught to despise

knowledge ; we have only to be careful that we are not proud of our knowledge, and that we have it under proper restraint. The great superiority of Thomas is seen by considering who were the principal mystics, and what they accomplished ; but this must be left to another chapter.

We will sum up in a few words what seems to be the great object of the *Imitatio*. It is to teach us the necessity of self-conquest and of complete submission to the will of God : " If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine " (John vii. 17). After attaining that fear of God which puts one above any other fear, one rises to that love of God and man which brings perfect peace.

The late Cardinal Newman, in his beautiful hymn, " Lead, kindly Light," brings out one of the lessons of the *Imitation*, and another lesson it inculcates is thus expressed by Aubrey de Vere :—

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee ; do thou
With courtesy receive him ; rise and bow,
And ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave."





CHAPTER II.

GERMAN MYSTICS.

SCHOLASTICISM attained its best period in the thirteenth century, towards the close of which appeared the famous *Summa Theologæ* of Thomas Aquinas. This work has remained in use and repute until the present day, notwithstanding the attacks on the author and his party by Duns Scotus and his pupil, William of Occam, which led to the battle between the Thomists and Scotists, and which in turn degenerated into disputes between the Franciscans and Dominicans. This contest was renewed over and over again, and certainly did no good to the cause of religion; and the feeling of the unsatisfactoriness of scholasticism led to the appearance of Christian mysticism. This mysticism, taking its rise with the St. Victors, attained its height in France

during the thirteenth century, and was succeeded by the German mystics of the fourteenth, when there arose “a deep desire for the union of man with God, a real longing for God.” The richest fruit thus produced is to be seen in the Brothers of Common Life, and in the literary offspring of one of their number, namely, the *Imitation*.

Scholasticism was still in full force when Hugo de St. Victor attempted to unite it with mysticism. His writings take a very high position, and it is said that St. Bernard derived much benefit from them. He was born in 1097, but there is a doubt as to his place of birth, some giving the preference to Alsace, others to Saxony. The probability of the latter being correct is testified by the inscription on his tomb; besides, we first hear of him at the convent of Hammersleben, where he lived up to his eighteenth year. At that date he went to Paris with his uncle, Archdeacon Hugo of Halberstadt, when they were both persuaded to enter the monastery of St. Victor, and became Canons Regular of St. Augustine. The monks appreciated their learning, and appointed the younger Hugo Director of the school, which gave him opportunity for study and for literary work. His

writings, of which there are three volumes in the Abbé Migne's series, are not likely to be much read at the present time, though they were very highly esteemed when written. His choice of such subjects as "Noah's Moral Ark," "The Mystical Ark," "The Four Wills of Christ," show the poetical tendency of his mysticism. He also wrote many commentaries, but they have no exegetical value, being chiefly of a homiletical nature. His principal pupil was Richard de St. Victor, who was born in Scotland, but who settled as a Canon Regular at the monastery of St. Victor. He uses the arguments of mysticism in favour of Christian doctrine, showing the all-powerfulness of love, and explaining its self-manifesting power. He was the means of breaking the power of the tradition of the schoolmen, by showing that contemplation has a higher aim than mere dialectics. He died in 1142.

Adam of St. Victor, who died in 1173, wrote a number of sequences, and there were several other writers of the school; but the principal fruit of their work may be said to have been shown by St. Bernard and, when modified by German thought, by Thomas à Kempis. The Abbé Migne quotes the following from the preface of M. S. Ropartz to his edition

of the select works of Thomas, as to what is the definition of the principles and the aim of practical mysticism as developed from this school :—

" In its admirable principles, in its theory, so true and so simple, this is what is Christian mysticism. The only and the supreme aim of life is the conformity or union of man with God in such a way that all thoughts, and human affections, are seen by their conformity with the view of the Divine love with which God sees and loves everything ; but since the Fall sin is always present to interpose a thick veil, an immense wall, or fatal barrier between man and God ; we must first begin by tearing down the veil, knocking down the wall, and getting over the barrier. The grace of God and the effort of the human will must agree always and necessarily, as in all the material acts of life, and the rock of the mystic was always the exaggeration of grace, as the error of philosophy was the exaggeration of liberty. The first thought that the destruction of sin was to be obtained by the practice of the contrary virtue. Follow the Master, and He will lead you into the tabernacles of mysteries, the three great virtues which are the bases of a devout life—renunciation, humility and obedience, which will give

you the means of conquering evils. When aided by grace vice is swept away, and the mind becomes a splendid mirror wherein is reflected Divine truth. It contemplates itself in the supreme truth ; it meditates on it, and applies to it all its intelligent faculties. Such is the rehabilitation of the Spirit, such is the illuminative life."

Charlier de Gerson was the last of the French school of his age, and strove, as others did, to unite theological science and scholasticism with mysticism. His style was rather diffuse, as may be seen in his *Meditation of the Heart*. He was opposed to all absolutism in religion, and had great zeal for reform ; yet, notwithstanding this, he feared the tendency of German mysticism, which was then dominant, thinking it too speculative, and in danger of being too free. He even attacked Ruysbroek for what he considered pantheism, although he was an admirer of his works. There was a greater freedom of thought and expression in the German mysticism of the fourteenth century, which was the successor of the French of the thirteenth, and this freedom drew down on many of its exponents the charge of heresy. It, however, had a great influence upon the German people, and was a means of keeping up the feeling of religion, which

suffered considerably from abuses in the hierarchy and in the monasteries.

The desire for holiness of life led to the rise of such communities as those of the Beguines and Beghards, whose religion was essentially practical, as they went about doing good. It also led to the formation of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, who were no workers, but mere mystics, but whose higher doctrines were followed by Meister Eckhardt, the first great writer of this school. The Brethren of the Free Spirit soon degenerated into licence, and paid no honour or obedience to any authority. Meister Eckhardt avoided their excesses, but he was looked upon with suspicion, and his writings condemned and destroyed. His ideas were, however, promulgated by Henry Suso and Tauler, each according to their natures; Suso being the exponent of poetic, Tauler of sentimental mysticism.

Meister Eckhardt was probably born at Strassburg, where he became a Dominican monk, and was so esteemed that he was appointed Provincial of the Order of Preachers in Saxony, and afterwards Vicar-General of Bohemia, where he showed great zeal for reform. In 1320 he became prior of a monastery at Frankfurt, and it was then that he was accused of spreading

heretical doctrines, and brought before the judgment of the Inquisition, who condemned him ; but his condemnation, which was confirmed by a Papal Bull, was not issued until 1329, a short time after his death. He was accused of "wanting to know more than he ought." He was strong in expressing his adhesion to Church doctrines, but it was his manner of interpreting them that brought on him the charges of heresy. For he treated them as allegories, and spoke of nature as a manifestation of the supernatural, and much of his preaching might be understood as pantheistic (though he tried to guard it from being so considered), because he spoke of God as being everything as well as being in everything. His chief idea is that speculation must lead man to the conscience of his unity with God, showing that he valued knowledge above love ; which was not the doctrine held by the other mystics. Richard de St. Victor and others of his school desired to "found their mysticism on internal experience clearly defined," while Eckhardt's is "a broad manifestation of the energy of the human will." With him the presence of God makes heaven, and his idea of hell is the complete separation from God, the torments of absence from Him being the anguish felt by the sinner,

as his punishment is this absence and “the negation of the happiness enjoyed by the good in the presence of God.”* The doctrine which he took from the Brethren of the Free Spirit was, according to his interpretation, that Justice is the true and supreme state of Liberty, for the just alone can be truly independent, as nothing can affect them. Eckhardt’s sermons were very popular, as he spoke with earnestness to the people in their own language.

The chief exponent of Eckhardt’s teaching was John Tauler, who was born at Strassburg in 1290, of a noble family. He entered the order of the Dominicans in 1308, and went to Paris to study theology. Duns Scotus had just left, but he had no sympathy with scholasticism, and followed Eckhardt to Strassburg, and attended his lectures there.

The pope had a quarrel with Louis of Bavaria, who was then the German emperor; and as the town of Strassburg remained loyal to the emperor, the pope put it under an interdict, which led to most of the clergy leaving the town. Tauler, however, and some other Dominicans stayed on, and preached to the people, and comforted them. While there he

* Schmidt, *Les Mystiques*.

founded a society called the Friends of God. Nicolas of Basle, though a layman, had great influence over Tauler, and persuaded him to leave off preaching for a time, so that he might gain more spirituality. Tauler then tried to reform the clergy, which made for him many enemies. His sermons had a powerful effect on the people, and for some time he was in favour with the Bishop of Strassburg, until the death of Louis of Bavaria and the succession of another German emperor, when the bishop, having made his peace with Rome, turned against Tauler because he preferred to remain faithful to the town. Soon after that Strassburg was visited by a severe plague, but though many left Tauler still stayed, and tried to comfort the people by saying that "an unjust excommunication is changed into a blessing." On peace being restored to the town he retired to the Charter House near Strassburg, and after a time went to Cologne, where he attacked pantheistic tendencies; he did not stay long, but returned to Strassburg, where he died in 1361, after a life full of labours and of noble endeavours. Tauler considered poverty of great importance to the spiritual life, and in his *Imitation of the Poor Life of Christ* he advocates the abnegation of

everything : “ To imitate Christ is to lead us to God.” But with him this imitation consists chiefly in meditating on the Passion of Christ, not in imitating His whole life, for even in Tauler’s sermons little is said of the *life* of Christ, mostly of His death. He felt the importance of grace, but says that as “ soon as man desires God, grace comes to his aid ; ” that “ grace is the medium between the natural man and the perfect one.” Neither was Tauler an ascetic, for though he considered that fasting might be useful, he says, “ Kill the sin, not the flesh,” and he further recommends us not to set too high an opinion on works. Less logical than Eckhardt, and less poetical than Suso, he was more practical, appealed more to the feelings, and was more popular than either. It is interesting to contrast the exaggerated sentimentalism of Suso with the “ sweet reasonableness ” of Thomas à Kempis. Suso writes : “ Lord, one little hour without Thee is a whole year ; to be estranged one day from Thee is as much as a thousand years to a loving heart.” Thomas teaches us love to our neighbour, while Suso writes of the wickedness of those who “ indulge in temporal love.” “ It is as impossible,” he says of those who will not give up “ perishable love,” to be saved

"as to compress the heavens together and enclose them in a nutshell." He adds, "Neither true love, nor entire joy, nor constant peace of mind, was ever obtained by any heart from its fellow-creatures." He acknowledges that the highest duty is to do the will of God ; but how differently is it expressed in his works from the short, telling sentences of the *Imitation* !

Suso also differed from Tauler in being more ascetical, and in thinking suffering more necessary. He considered that the imitation of Christ consisted in renewing oneself in the suffering of Christ, and imitating that, saying that "the imitation of the Passion of Christ would change the most simple man into a perfect master of wisdom." He was born in 1300, and became a pupil of Eckhardt while he was at Cologne. He had become a Dominican novice at Constance, and on the death of his mother, when he was only eighteen, he returned there, and began a life of humiliation and self-denial, submitting to the most painful abstinence and chastisements until he was forty, when he became a preacher, and preached the doctrines he had practised. He wrote the *Book of Everlasting Wisdom*, in which he taught that the pious man should follow the sufferings of Christ. He was fanatical

and fantastic in his writings, which he gathered together before his death, illustrating them with wonderful mystical pictures.

The most practical outcome of the philosophy of Eckhardt is that exemplified in the writings of Ruysbroek. We shall speak later of his influence with Gerard Groot in the foundation of the Brothers of Common Life; we can only speak here of the practical mysticism that comes to light again in the writings of Thomas à Kempis, who seems to have highly appreciated the works of Ruysbroek, and translated one of them into Latin; for this author, though acquainted with Latin sufficiently for reading the works of others, never had enough mastership of it to write himself in that language, but wrote in his own German in such a style as made them masterpieces of the time. Though born in 1293, it was not until 1353 that he entered the Augustinian monastery at Groenendaal, which had only just been founded, and of which he was at once requested to be the Prior. The titles of some of his works, such as *The Mirror of Everlasting Happiness* and the *Ornament of the Spiritual Marriage*, give some idea of the nature of his mysticism. He always kept to the doctrines

of the Church, though seeking by contemplation the Divine mysteries. He calls the world vanity, and wishes us to rise above it, because the feeling of having no desires in the world gives us great freedom; for “he who is the conqueror of himself is lord of the world and inheritor of heaven.” He treats the deepest thoughts with precision, expressing noble feelings with great spiritual power; yet at times he is very obscure, so that although he has attacked pantheism in others, he laid himself open to the same charge, and there was some justice in Gerson’s remark when Schoonhoven defended his friend from the Chancellor’s attack, that it was a pity that the obscurity of his language should have led to such a misunderstanding.

These views were taken up by Gerard Groot and Florentius, and through them by Thomas à Kempis.

There is a book which appeared in the fourteenth or fifteenth century that contains the essence of German mysticism, of which only one MS. is known to exist, dated 1497. It is supposed to have been written soon after the death of Tauler by a priest of Frankfort, who was in sympathy with the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Its nature is summed up in a saying, “Those who would live for God can only become

capable of so doing by repentance and self-denial, and then by love." Luther speaks thus of it: "Read this little book, and then say whether theology is old or new with us, for this book is not new. God grant that this book may come more and more to light; when it will be found that German theologians are without doubt the best." The praise of Luther brought this *German Theology* into such favour that seventy editions were rapidly exhausted, and it has been in demand ever since. There have been six or seven editions in Germany during this century, as well as thirteen translations into English, two of which appeared in 1854,—one by Mrs. Malcolm and one by Miss Susannah Winkworth. It was a pity that such a title as *German Theology* was given to it, for a wrong impression of the work may be thus conveyed, and its name, as well as Luther's praise of it, have prevented its being appreciated by Roman Catholics, though even some of them have spoken well of it.

The *Imitation* is much superior to this work, not only in form but in fulness of treatment of all that relates to the life of a Christian. It is also superior to the *Imitation* of Tauler, for this writer only dwells on the outward life of Christ, which

he uses as a symbol for the inner life, while Thomas à Kempis teaches us the necessity of Christ being born in us. It resembles the writings of Ruysbroek in speaking of the necessity of receiving God in our hearts, so that we may thus be raised to Him. There is in it the same "feeling of heavenly peace" that, as Böhringer says, "lies over the whole landscape," the same phases of thought of the purest religion.

In common with other mystics Thomas considers the world as nothing but vanity, and, like them, he seeks for himself abstraction, both theoretical and practical, from the world; he also considers the union with God as the highest good. He, however, differs from them in this, that, while they have a mere speculative contemplation in their hunger after God, and will have this satisfied immediately in heart and mind by knowing and loving Him, he, while possessing the same hunger after God, is content to find Him in love, and testify by his life to this love, and strive to nourish it. His aim is practical while theirs is speculative; they speculate on God as the Trinity, while he says (*Imitation*, I. 1): "What will it avail thee to dispute sublimely of the Trinity if thou be void of humility?" If narrower in

his views, he is not only more practical in his aims, but there is a greater individuality shown in his relations to the community in which he was brought up. We cannot help feeling that what he asks us to do can to be done. When we read his rules for monastic life we cannot help seeing not only that they are suitable, but that they are taken from life, and from his own experience of life. This love of the practical as well as the poetical is shown also in the other works of Thomas, especially in the manner in which he treats of the characters of Martha and Mary.

It is to Bonaventura that we must give the credit of first taking the characters of Martha and Mary as types of the contemplative and of the active life. Thomas à Kempis has more fully carried out the idea, and dwelt on the great importance of the life devoted to good works as exemplified in the action of Martha, as well as of such a life as that of Mary, given up to hearing and contemplating the Divine word. He says: "Although Mary's part is the more to be chosen and pleasanter, yet the laborious part of her sister Martha is praiseworthy, and accepted by God;" that "the sisters should not be separated;" that Mary should "re-

member that she could not so freely rest unless Martha had been willing to work for her." "Martha, great shall be thy reward in heaven, as thou art so faithful in ministering." "Thy service is needed by the servants of Christ, and without thy care they are not free to serve God." The late Dr. Charles Beard, in his *Life of Luther*, says that "mysticism does not argue, it cannot appeal to any external authority ; it broods, it meditates, it listens for the Divine voice. When that voice is heard, all others are necessarily silent." Such mysticism is in the *Imitation*; but there is more, for there is the incentive to action, and there is the recommendation to work like Martha as well as to pray like Mary.





CHAPTER III.

BIRTHPLACE OF THE *IMITATIO* AND ITS SOURCES.

"Seek for a secret place for thyself, Love to dwell alone with thyself."—*Imit.* III. 53.

HERE are some books which seem made for all countries and for all times, although on a close examination we find that they could have been produced only at a certain period and in a certain country. This applies to the *Imitatio*, for that it is appropriate to all countries is evident from the appreciation it has received from all, from the Gallic and Latin races as well as from the Teutonic; and yet by studying its language we find that it could only have proceeded from a Teutonic country. In the same way as regards the period, though at first sight any time in which monasteries were in existence would

seem suitable for its origin, yet from certain passages we perceive that it must have been written in the first half of the fifteenth century, for at that time the Carthusians and Cistercians were on friendly relations with the Augustinians, and it is to them that the author refers. If it had been written in the thirteenth century by a Benedictine, as some wish to assert, the Benedictines would have been mentioned, or if not, it is probable that the Dominicans or Franciscans would have been quoted, as these orders were then the most important. The time of its production is also fixed by a passage in which the author speaks of the rapidity with which the monks fall away from their first enthusiasm : "How quickly do we decline from our pristine fervour." Such a remark can only apply to an order recently founded, and when Thomas à Kempis wrote, the order to which he belonged, the Brothers of Common Life, had been in existence but a few years ; it is also worthy of notice that a similar remark is to be found in the same writer's *Life of Florentius*. Further, there are passages referring to the quarrels of the mendicant orders and to pilgrimages. Now in the early times the Dominicans and Franciscans united in preaching, and not until the

fifteenth century did quarrels arise, and it was about the same time that pilgrimages took place.

Many have thought with Mons. Renan that Italy must have been the country of the book's birth, on account of the calm pervading it. However, a calm spirit could be maintained in a monastery in Holland as well as in one in Italy. Besides, the many Flemicisms in the work point to Holland as its birthplace. That many of these Flemicisms do not exist in some MSS. is no proof that they do not belong to the original, for it is probable that a scribe in Italy or France coming upon such a word as *exterius* would either omit it or substitute some other word for it; while it would be next to impossible that a scribe would think of altering an ordinary Latin word for an extraordinary one which is used only in the country to which he belonged. The Abbé Spitzen and Father Becker have pointed out numbers of such words: proving, without a doubt, that Holland is the birthplace of the *Imitation*. It will be needless to quote all the words they mention; we will simply take one or two as specimens, in order to show the force of these peculiar words.

Scire exterius would naturally be a stumbling-block to Italians and French,

and therefore in many MSS. *exterius* is changed into *memoriter*, a commoner word. The author was evidently thinking in Dutch when the words *van buiten* occurred to him, and he translated them into an equivalent Latin word. The meaning is well expressed by our English term *out and out*; and the term *van buiten* is still used to express the sense of thoroughness. In Book I., chap. xxv., occurs the phrase *deberes pigritari*. The natural translation, "you ought to be idle," would hardly do. The word *debere* is a translation of the Dutch word *zouldt*, the auxiliary, and in French must be translated into the conditional mood, though in English our auxiliary *would* is suitable to the passage. In Book II., chap. vii., we read *deberet libenter tecum habitare* applied to Jesus. The usual force of the verb is inappropriate to Him, and such a form could not have proceeded from a French or Italian source, though it is easily rendered into English as "would willingly live with thee." The Latin word *habere* is used as an equivalent for the Dutch word *hebben*, to have, in places such as I. 16, *libenter habemus*, where the French could not use such a word, but must say as an equivalent *sommes bien aise*, while the Italians render it *amiamo*. *Prævidere* is used for *providere*;

satisesse for *satisfacere*, etc. The word *exterius* has been a great stumbling-block to the Gersenists, who assert that it is not in the original; which is a very questionable statement, as it exists in *two hundred MSS.*, while it is replaced by another word in only five MSS., three different words being used in three of them. This word is found in Busch's *Chronicle*, and also in a letter of Florentius.

There are several other expressions which, though not Flemicisms, are used in a sense peculiar to the fraternity to which Thomas belonged. *Prelatus* is used in the *Imitatio*, as well as in other works of Thomas, where it occurs seventy-two times, as equivalent to a *superior*. *Devoti* is a word much used; it was originally used by Gerard Groot to designate the Brothers of Common Life, and Busch uses it for the same purpose in his *Chronicle*, and this is the sense in which it is used in the *Imitation*, that work being primarily written for the Brethren. In chapter xiv. of the first book the author says that "diversities of judgments cause dissensions" between the *religiosi* and the *devoti*. Here the *devoti* is used in the more restricted sense of the canons, in distinction to the *religiosi* or ordinary brethren. A passage in the first chapter of the fourth book

seems to fix the date and the place, for we read, "Many run to various places to visit the relics of the saints," as it was common for crowds to come from all parts of Holland, Belgium, and North Germany, in the fifteenth century, to see the relics which were exposed to public view, with great solemnity, every seven years. At Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1440, at one of these festivals, the roofs of some houses fell in, from the large concourse of pilgrims that mounted on them to see the relics.

There is another passage that seems to point to Holland or Belgium as the home of the *Imitatio*. It is in the fifth chapter of the fourth book, where it says that the priest has the cross both before and behind him. There are still some ancient chasubles in Belgium, and we presume in Holland also, on which the cross is worked both in front and at the back. We do not know of any such being in France, where the cross was generally placed behind ; nor in Italy, where it was in front.

The following description of the country which was the cradle of the *Imitatio* is taken from the work of De Amicis on Holland :—" Near Zwolle are fine roads, bordered by trees which refresh the eye ; on every side the brambly waste recedes,

giving place to patches of verdure ; fields and meadows and new plantations rise, herds of cattle are seen, and new canals run from the peat swamps to a great one called the Dedemswaart, the main artery of the Over Yssel, which has transformed the desolate country into a flourishing province.”* Of Zwolle Dr. Cruise writes : † —“It is a model Dutch city, and one of the prettiest in Holland, with its numerous canals, drawbridges, and handsome buildings. All around we see the exquisitely neat villas of the wealthier inhabitants, with their trim gardens and pleasure grounds reaching to the water’s edge ;” and of Mount St. Agnes, that “it is a slightly elevated plateau from which the surrounding country is well seen.”

Some writers think that such a peaceful work as the *Imitation* must have been issued in the thirteenth century, as there was then comparative peace, while it could not have been written in such a stormy period as the beginning of the fifteenth century, when there were wars and rumours of wars, pestilence and famine, excommunications launched on all parties in turn, contests of popes against popes ; and yet we have only to read the life of Thomas

* English translation, p. 406. † Page 291.

à Kempis to see how little effect this stormy period had on his life—he writes *Chronicles* without mentioning a word about the storms that were raging around him ; and if no mention of political affairs is to be found in such historical works, we can still less expect them in such a work as the *Imitation* ; besides, there is the same calm in all his other works. How little attention he must have paid to the events happening around him is shown by his speaking of the prosperous times of Frederick of Blankenheim, Bishop of Utrecht, and yet this good bishop thought nothing of putting numbers to death by fire and sword.

Some of those who are opposed to the claims of Thomas à Kempis, and champion Italy as the birthplace of the *Imitatio*, point to the existence in it of several Italian forms of the Latin words. This cannot, and need not, be denied, being easily explained, as these words are often quotations from writers such as Bonaventura or St. Bernard, and are used by Gerard Groot, Florentius, and others of the Windesheim circle, with whom the latter saint was a great favourite. Dr. Cruise has taken much trouble in comparing the works of St. Bernard with the *Imitatio*, and he finds a great similarity

between them. In the first chapter of the *Imitation* he shows resemblances to thirty passages of St. Bernard. The work is really so full of quotations, that one cannot help agreeing with Brother Azarias in his *Culture of the Spiritual Sense*, where he says : " You can scarcely read a sentence that does not recall some passage now in the Old, now in the New Testament." It reflects their pure rays like an unbroken mirror, and one cannot help seeing that the Bible is the chief source from which the author draws. Next to that he draws his inspiration from St. Bernard, whose writings were much used, as we have just shown. Other sources are Gregory the Great, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and the Missal. We even find quotations from Aristotle, from Ovid, and from Seneca. This is exactly what might have been expected ; for, in accordance with the advice of Gerard Groot, his followers made collections of sentences, taken from various authors, in books called *Rapiaria*. We hear of selections from St. Bernard being made both by John Heusden and by John à Kempis. It is supposed by Zungo that Thomas began from his early novitiate to collect materials about the year 1406. These would take a concrete form in the

first treatise about 1413, or even 1410 according to Kettlewell. Msgr. Malou thinks that it would have been completed about 1414, and the other three treatises soon after, the four being issued together about 1424, as the Kirchheim MS. is supposed to be written in 1425. It is not necessary to imagine that Thomas read all the books from which he quoted, as the *rapiaria* made by the different Brethren, and for the benefit of all, gave him materials ready to his hand. A remarkable instance of this is shown by Father Becker in the case of a letter of Schoonhoven, a predecessor well known to Thomas, who mentions his writings in his *Chronicle*. In this letter are quotations from St. Bernard, St. Jerome, St. Gregory, and Seneca, and these quotations are all to be found in the first book of the *Imitation*. The Abbé Spitzen also points out three passages, quoted both by Schoonhoven and Thomas à Kempis, "from a certain saint," who is shown to be John of Tambach, to whom the authorship of the *Imitation* has been ascribed. He was a Dominican of great learning, having been in 1348 Rector of the University of Paris, after which he went to Rome, and was appointed by Urban V., in 1356, Master of the Sacred Palace.

He was often sent to inquire into the conduct of the monks, and to consider what could be done for the reformation of the monasteries. He is chiefly famous for his *Consolatorium Theologicum*, a MS. of which, dated 1493, is in the University Library of Paris. The first printed edition of it was published at Menz in 1470, under the title of *Consolacio Theologicae*. The work of Bonaventura from which Thomas derived many passages and thoughts was his *Thoughts on the Life of Christ*, which was one of the works used among the Brethren. Henry Maude was a courtier at the Court of Holland, but the fame of Gerard Groot attracted him, and he became one of the Brethren. He had not learnt Latin, but was highly valued for his great sense and fine feelings. He wrote several treatises in Dutch, one of which was translated by Thomas into Latin, and several quotations from it are to be found in the *Imitation*.

Some of the most fruitful sources of the *Imitation* are to be found in the writings of John Ruysbroek, according to Herr Busken-Huet the most remarkable writer in Holland in the fifteenth century. Born at Ruysbroek, a village in Brabant, in 1293, for some time he was curate of St. Gudule, at Brussels, but when sixty

years of age he entered the newly-appointed monastery of the Augustinians at Groenendal, near Brussels, and was elected the first Prior. His education was not very deep, since even as a child he meditated more than he learnt. He never was able to write in Latin, as we observed before, though he knew it well enough to read the principal mystic writers, as well as Aristotle and many classical authors. He was much given to meditation, and took walks in the wood, where he saw visions, for which he received the title of "Doctor Ecstaticus." His mysticism was clear of pantheism, or of any departure from Church doctrines. His works were all written in Dutch, and are highly valued, and he is supposed to have fixed the Dutch language much as Luther did the German rather later. The works of Ruysbroek were translated into German, French, and Latin. He was a friend of Gerard Groot, who learnt much from him, and was highly esteemed by all the Windesheim circle, which accounts for the presence of quotations of him in the *Imitation*. He was very strict in his own living, but always gentle and kind to the poor, though severe upon the vices of the rich. Busken-Huet writes: "As a thinker,

Ruysbroek is much superior to Thomas. It is to him that the Netherlands is indebted for the planting in it of the Italian mysticism much more than to Thomas. Books have their fates : the greater genius lives only in middle-age Church history and in Dutch literature ; the book of the lesser has become the common property of Christianity. The success of the *Imitation* was brilliant and lasting as it came at the right time and comprised the religious views of centuries and then handed them down to posterity.* Besides the sources above mentioned, Thomas drew extensively from the writings of his own community ; and the sayings of Gerard Groot and of Florentius, which he quotes in their lives, are to be found also in the *Imitation*. Msgr. Malou, Bishop of Bruges, in his *Recherches Historiques*, has pointed out the strong resemblance of passages in that work to those of Florentius.

We have tried in this chapter to show that Holland was the birthplace of the *Imitation*, and that the sources from which it was drawn are to be found in the works of the Brethren of Common Life, or in works that were used by them.

* Busken-Huet (C), *Het Land van Rembrandt*, 2nd ed., vol. i. Haarlem, 1886.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE.

“He therefore that intends to attain to the more inward and spiritual things must with Jesus withdraw himself from the multitude.”

—*Imit. I. 20.*

“Never be wholly idle,
But read or write, or pray or muse,
Or do some useful work for all.”

—*Imit. I. 19.*



HE *Imitation* was primarily written for the monasteries of the Brothers of Common Life, and probably owed its birth to the recommendation of their founder to make *Rapiaria*, or books of extracts. *Rapiarium* is defined in Ducange's Glossary as a collection in which sentences taken elsewhere are brought together; and to do this was the custom of the community whose founders were Gerard Groot and Florentius Radewyn.

Gerardus Magnus, or Gerard Groot, the son of Werner Groot, sheriff and

burgomaster of Deventer, was born October 1340, and received his early education at the Grammar School of his native town. At the age of fifteen he went to the University of Paris, where for three years he studied philosophy and theology, and took his degree of Master of Arts. From there, after spending a short time at his home, he started for Cologne, where he became a Professor. He was now on the high road to success, having been given the canonries of Utrecht and of Aix, besides several prebends. He was, however, intended for higher things, and having been warned by Henry Kalkar, a Carthusian, whose friendship he had made while in Paris, of the vanity of earthly things, he gave up all his offices, and retired for three years to the Carthusian monastery of Monch in Gueldres, where he spent his time in reflection, in the study of the Scriptures, and in prayer. His great abilities were appreciated by the Carthusian Brethren, who pressed on him the duty of taking orders. He did not consider himself worthy of the office of priest, but consented to become a deacon, as that would enable him to preach. He then obtained a license from the Bishop of Utrecht, and commenced to

travel through the towns and villages of the Low Countries, preaching to the people and calling them to repentance. As the sermons preached to the people were in their own dialect, the effect produced was marvellous, and since the churches were unable to hold the crowds who flocked to hear him, he preached in the open air. Gerard was, however, not permitted to do this for any length of time, for by attacking the vices of the clergy he made enemies, who persuaded the Bishop of Utrecht to stop his licence.

Gerard was forced to submit, but he was not the man to be inactive, and at once looked out for some field of labour in which to employ his energies. Such a field was suggested to him by a visit which he made to John Ruysbroek, the famous mystic, at the monastery of Gronthal, for when he saw the happy life led by the canons, and the loving spirit prevailing amongst them, he at once determined to found such a community.

Gerard then started for Paris, where he purchased a number of books that would be useful for the instruction of the young, and returned with them to Deventer, where he was joined by Florentius Radewyn.

This Florentius had been at one time

a wealthy canon of the Cathedral of Utrecht, but having listened to the preaching of Gerard Groot, he was so carried away by this preacher's eloquence and earnestness that he gave up his canonry, and when Gerard arrived at Deventer he followed him there, and assisted him in knitting together a little band of men who were willing to live a life of care for the benefit of their fellow-men, by helping them in their studies, and by employing them in making copies of the Bible, and of various devotional works.

As a writer in the *Saturday Review** says : "Boys whose handwriting gave promise as regards the mechanical part of the work, and whose literary capacity enabled them to undertake it, found in the occupation of scribes an opening for maintaining themselves ; and as their numbers increased, the system of boarding-houses or hostellries was established (as we shall see later), like the Halls at Oxford." It was natural that there should be now some bond of union, and that they should form one community, the origin of which was as follows :—Florentius came to Gerard, and said, "Dear master, how would it do if I and these clerks who

* May 19th, 1883.

are here were to put our earnings into a common fund, and live together?" "Live together!" replied Gerard; "the Mendicants would never allow it; they would do their worst to prevent it." "But what is to prevent our trying?" said Florentius; "perhaps God will give us success." To which Gerard replied, "Well, then, in God's name commence. I will be your advocate, and faithfully defend you against all who rise up against you." This was the commencement of the institution of the "Brethren of the Common Life, of Good Will," or "Devoti Clerici." Thomas à Kempis himself, in his *Life of Florentius*, has given us a good idea of what kind of men belonged to this community, and the kind of life they led, for, as he says, he "had the opportunity of daily watching and attending to their devout ways and conversation, and was greatly rejoiced in beholding their good lives, and listening to the gracious words that proceeded from the mouths of these humble men of God." He further describes them as living in the world "without a spark of worldliness about them. Abiding quietly at home, they busied themselves in copying books, especially the sacred Scriptures; engaging in devout meditations, they obtained com-

fort and refreshment in the midst of their labours by having recourse to ejaculatory prayers or short aspirations of the soul. Early in the morning they went to church, and said the office of matins." While thus writing of them, Thomas seems to be giving a living example of the precepts he has written in the *Imitation*, for he writes that, "Holding obedience to be the highest rule of life, they endeavoured with all their might to conquer self, to subdue their evil passions, and to break the motions of their own natural will." And as he continues, "Great grace and true devotion were among them, and they edified many, both by their word and example; and by patiently bearing the derisions of those who were in bondage to the world, they won many over to a contempt of worldly things, so that those who before had despised them, now counting their past lives to be without honour and as foolishness, afterwards turned to God, and experienced in themselves the grace of devotion; and having first purged their consciences, they openly confessed themselves to be true servants of God, and their real friends."*

As to the work of these Brethren, we

* Quoted by Kettlewell, *Thomas*, etc., i., 116, 117

find that they were employed not only in writing out the Scriptures, which was to them a great means of support (for by the advice of Florentius they were now living together and could act together), but the lay Brethren occupied themselves in tilling the ground, and in other manual labours, for some made shoes, others worked at the loom, or made baskets, etc., while the clerical Brothers preached and conducted the various services.

The term *Devoti* is applied not only to the scribes but to all the members of the community. The special ordination of canons took place later, and Gerard, though able to assist the little community by his pen and by his instruction, did not live long enough to found a convent, for while attending one of his friends he caught the plague and died, leaving the task to Florentius, whom he commended to the Brethren as his successor. The chief glory of the foundation was due to Gerard, as he prepared the way for it. He ordered the reading of the Gospels, then of biographies and sayings of the Fathers, to show the spirit he wished to prevail in the community ; he himself even set the example which he wished to be followed by drawing up collections of pieces taken from the Epistles of St. Paul,

from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the devotional works of St. Bernard, of St. Anselm, St. Augustine, and of other Fathers, which selections may be considered as precursors of the *Imitation*, where are to be found many passages which are reflections of Gerard's sayings.

Florentius, whom Thomas à Kempis describes as "of noble manners, modest, cheerful, affable, and generous, of a pleasant cut of features, moderate in stature, and a handsome figure," was able to carry out his friend's wishes, and founded in 1386 the monastery of Windesheim, which was the parent house from which sprang so many similar ones, one of which was on Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, rendered famous by being the dwelling-place for so many years of Thomas à Kempis. Some Brethren, partly priests and partly laymen, were still left at Deventer, where Florentius stayed. It was here that Thomas first arrived when he came to look for his brother and to join the Brethren, of whom there were then about twenty, with four ordained priests. Some Brethren came from other monasteries, as six of the *Devoti* who went to live at Windesheim had come from the convent of Emsteyn, near Utrecht, where they had been taking their vows, and this

convent was adopted as a new daughter house in 1398, under the authority of the canons of Windesheim, an example which was followed a few years later by that of Groenendaal, and then by those of many others, so that thirty years after the foundation of Windesheim there were forty-five convents connected with it. Thirty-seven of these were for men and eight for women. This connection with Windesheim and Deventer, the clerical and the lay Brothers being considered as completing one another, which was in accordance with the design of their founder, enables us to understand the rapidity of the circulation of the *Imitation*, as it is generally acknowledged that the best MSS. emanated from those monasteries connected with the circle of Windesheim, by whom it was spread to those monasteries kindred in spirit, such as the Carthusians, who were among the first to appreciate the work and copy it. That it originated from the Brothers of Common Life is evident from the use of certain words, such as *Devoti*, a word used specially by them, as also from the spirit of the work being in accordance with the spirit of the Brethren, of whom even Luther testified that "such monasteries and brother houses please me beyond measure. Would to God that

all monastic institutions were like them ! Clergymen, cities, and countries would then be better served and be more prosperous."

Among the most important of the Brethren to be considered is John à Kempis, the brother of Thomas, whose senior he was by fifteen years. He was one of the first to join the community, and being a man of energy and of organising power he was of great use in founding various of the religious houses, the first of which was Windesheim, where he was for some time Prior ; and the last, Bethany, where he died, nursed in his latter days by his brother Thomas. John was of a more active disposition than his brother, yet he was by no means deficient in learning, while he was also skilled in copying and collating MSS. He is said to have made a selection of extracts from the works of St. Bernard. His friend Vos of Heusden also made a similar selection ; he was the second Prior of Windesheim, and wrote an epistle on the life and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was used as a spiritual manual by the Brethren. Vos of Heusden attracted many to the convent by his persuasiveness and devotion, and under his guidance the monastery flourished ; as the chronicler Buschius says,

"They flocked thither in great numbers, for the salvation of their souls."

John of Schoonhoven was a disciple of Ruysbroek and sub-prior of Groenendaal. He was not one of the Brethren, but had great sympathy with them, and his letter to his nephew is looked upon as one of their classics. Of this letter we speak elsewhere (p. 40). John Gronde was a most eloquent preacher, who came from Amsterdam at the request of Gerard Groot to Deventer, where he lived with Florentius.

John Brinckerinck, who succeeded Gronde as Director of the Sisters, was also very eloquent; he was an ascetic, as he slept seven hours, seldom ate more than once daily, never accepted invitations, but often himself invited poor deserving citizens to his table.

Lubert Berner was one of the friends of Thomas à Kempis, and had great powers in enkindling piety in other people.

Henry Brume was a great friend of Lubert, and a devoted Christian. He was content to do menial work as well as his priestly duties, and died of the plague caught from attending to others, as he never spared himself.

Æmilius van Buren was the successor of Florentius, but he only held the posi-

tion for four years. He was of a loving disposition, and his last advice to the Brethren was "to love one another."

James of Viana possessed in a high degree the virtue of humility, though he was refined in manner; he wished to remain a mere clerk, but Florentius, who knew his value, insisted on his being ordained a priest.

Arnold of Schoonhoven was one of the earliest friends of Thomas à Kempis, and Thomas dwells particularly on his great piety, as he was from his childhood devoted to the service of God, and wished to become a pupil of Florentius, who after trying him for some time, and seeing his desire to learn and labour, granted him a lodging in his own house; and as Thomas was admitted to this house at the same time they became companions, and occupied one bedroom. He showed great fervour in his devotions, and used every opportunity for prayer. His converse was not of the nature of a learned dissertation, but of true conversion to God and amendment of life. He was always ready to help others, and studied spiritual things more than learning.

Not the least interesting of the brothers was John Cacabus (Kettel or Kessel), who was the cook at Deventer; several anec-

dotes are told of his simple nature, and of his self-denial and compassion for the poor. He had been wealthy and of a good family, but was yet willing to take a mean position. He had been attracted by the fame of Father Florentius, and went to Deventer and attended the public school, when he was so affected by the lives of the Brethren there that he gave up his interest in worldly things. He had previously purchased beautiful ornaments and grand robes, to be ready when he should enter the ministry, but he sold them all and gave the money for charitable purposes. Though in so lowly a position, he was highly valued for his conversation, and was often the means of giving good advice to the Brethren.

Another man who had some influence upon the life of Thomas à Kempis was Gerard of Zutphen, the *Scriptuarius* or Librarian who took charge of the manuscripts and books, and directed the labours of the scribes. Thomas speaks of him as "remarkable for his diligence in the study of the Holy Scriptures, drawing forth also from deep and recondite sentences of the Fathers various species of aromatic learning against the distempers of vice, etc."*

* Kettlewell, *Thomas*, etc., i., 291.

He wrote several books, and had a great desire for learning. Though often absent-minded, he was able to give good advice, and was much consulted by Florentius, as well as by the other Brethren. But above all other learning he prized the study of the Scriptures, and recommended their use, saying that "these books preach to you, and teach you more than we can possibly tell you."

He had a great respect for books, and treated them with great care. His death was much felt by the Brethren, and he was buried with honour by the Prior and the Brethren in the passage before the door of the church.

Thomas speaks with much affection of Everard de Eza, who cured him of an illness which he had. Everard was at one time a mocker of such as led a religious life, but being moved by the preaching of Gerard, whom he went to hear out of curiosity, he was converted, and induced by Gerard to become a companion and helper; Gerard dying soon after, he went to Florentius, stayed with him, and studied theology. He then visited the poor in their sickness without any fees, for he had been much esteemed as a physician. After this he founded one of the monasteries of the Canons Regular,

called "The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Wood" (A.D. 1394), and then devoted himself to preaching; and when he died in 1404 he was buried in his own church at St. Almelo.

All these men seemed filled with the spirit of the founders of the community, and helped to carry out their great desire, which was to have laymen and monks living in unity. Gerard had no hostility to monasticism, but he wished it pure; therefore he was friendly to the Carthusians, who were the purest order at the time. He did not, however, wish the community he founded to be so strict as the Carthusians were, so he chose the Augustinian Rule as the one to be observed.

The Augustinian Canons Regular claim a great antiquity, even as old as the Apostolic Church. The other monks oppose this by saying that monks existed before canons, but they claim to be monks as well as canons. It is, however, more probable that they were founded by St. Augustine, whose name they bear and whose rule they follow, and in whose time the name canon was applied to any one holding office in the Church. The first notice we find of them is in a charter of *Rheims*, issued in 1061 by Bishop Gervais, to re-establish the Abbey of St. Denis,

when there were appointed to be settled there canons who preferred the rule and order of St. Augustine, which rule was taken from his 109th Epistle. Innocent II. at the Lateran Council had ordered all the Canons Regular to follow this rule, so that they then took the name and title of Canons Regular of the order of St. Augustine. From that time these canons flourished exceedingly, and among the monasteries then founded was the famous one of St. Victor near Paris. They claimed precedence over other monks, in virtue of a bull of Pope Pius IV., but as this bull was only to the congregation of St. John Lateran, the monks of Monte Casino opposed it, and hence the Benedictines were allowed the precedence in some places, the Augustinians in others. They claim to have had 2777 cardinals and 20,135 archbishops of their order, and more than 100,000 abbeys.

Besides houses for men there were houses for women, who were not bound by any vow, and much resembled the Beguines, who had been founded previously, an idea of whose manner of life can be had from the Beguinages still existing at Bruges and at Ghent. The Belgians having a great love of liberty, it was thought they could be led by persuasion

better than be bound by vows. The whole spirit exhibited in the lives of these brothers and sisters is the same as is to be found in the *Imitation*, and the high esteem in which the author of this work was held is marked by the fact that he was chosen to write the lives of so many of the Brethren; and whenever one thinks of the Brothers of Common Life one calls to mind not only Gerard and Florentius, their founders, but also Thomas à Kempis, their historian.

Little need be added as to what took place after the death of Thomas. The mission of the Brethren was accomplished. As Kettlewell says, "The lights of such men as these were lights in dark places, reflecting in very truth the Light of Life." The country was in need of such a band of heroes, since it was then "distracted by factions, ruined by protracted feuds, and desolated by repeated visitations of pestilence."

The invention of printing put an end to one of their principal employments; but to meet the wants of the time they procured some type, and learnt the art from Arnold Terhoernen, one of their countrymen then living at Cologne, and set up a printing-press at Marienthal in 1474, when they printed several editions of a Breviary.

In 1476 they set up another printing-press in Brussels, and printed the *Gnotosolitus* of Arnoldus de Gheilhoven in folio. In 1480 they printed an edition of St. Laurence's *Postillæ Evangeliorum*, and in 1481 St. Bernard's *Sermons*. These were all printed from the same Gothic type, which was smaller than that which had previously been used in the Netherlands. There were printing-presses at Zwolle and at Deventer, but they belonged to private individuals.

They were, however, unable to compete with others, and as their scholars became dispersed owing to schools arising superior to theirs, their monasteries were gradually closed. In quiet times the *via media* is the safest, but in troublous times it is apt to lead to trouble. The growth of the Jesuits was hardly favourable to the liberty enjoyed in their Brother Houses, and however much Luther strove to help them, the spirit of Protestantism was against them ; they had served their day and generation, and must be content to pass quietly away, though not the least glory they have is that of having produced such a man as Thomas à Kempis, and such a book as the *Imitation*.



CHAPTER V.

THOMAS À KEMPIS.

“Blessed are the simple-hearted, for they shall enjoy much peace.”—*Imit.* I. 11.

“Happy is he who has lived well and died happily.”—*Imit.* I. 17.

“Great is his work whose love is great,
Great is his work whose work is truly done.”

—*Imit.* I. 15.

WHEN we love a book we naturally have a desire to become acquainted with its author. Sometimes such acquaintance brings disappointment, but more often we are rewarded, as when we find the life of an author in agreement with the spirit and tone of his work; and such is the case with the author of the *Imitation*, for we see in Thomas à Kempis a man of the highest piety, and one living a life of devotion and charity similar to that which is taught in his works.

Matthew Arnold says that “solitude is

the audience chamber of God," and no one can have found it more so than he who writes that "he sought for rest in many things, but found it not except in little corners and in little books," and of whom it is reported that he often felt called away from the conversation of the Brethren, by a voice telling him to retire to his cell. Notwithstanding that, the value of the little which he spoke was great, for it is said that "Divine things streamed from him as from a spring." Ullman says that "he was the best master of practical wisdom the Brethren ever reared," and that the devotional and practical mysticism of Gerard Groot found "its most finished product in the wisdom of life and love of Thomas à Kempis."

In the year 1380 there were living at Kempen, a small town in the diocese of Cologne, a worthy couple, John Hamærcken and his wife Gertrude. John was a good workman, diligent, simple, and honest, his name, "little hammer," being given him, it is supposed, from his working in metal. Gertrude, his wife, was of a deeply religious nature, and is said to have kept a school for children. In this year was born their second son, Thomas, known to us as à Kempis, from the town in which he was born, *Kempen*. Up to

the age of thirteen he lived with his parents, whom he helped when not studying at the grammar school of his native town. His father and mother had already given up their elder son to the service of God, and were now prepared to give up their second son also. He accordingly started on his journey to Deventer, where he expected to find his brother John, who had joined the circle of the Brothers of Common Life ; but on his arrival he was disappointed to find his brother away. Hearing, however, that he was at Windesheim, he started at once for that town, notwithstanding that it was twenty miles distant. His brother was glad to see him, but knowing how great would be the benefit if Thomas were brought up under the guidance of Florentius, he recommended him to return to Deventer. This he did, and was kindly received by Florentius, who treated him as a son, and at once won his affection ; and that the love was reciprocal is shown in the biography written subsequently by Thomas. We have already seen the mutual love which pervaded the community, and this made Thomas warmly attached to the brothers, and he was soon able to take an active part in their devotions. He shared his room with Arnold

of Schoonhoven, whose life he wrote, giving details of great interest, as showing the manner of life passed by the Brethren. We cannot help seeing the simplicity and ingenuousness of his youth from the quiet way in which he speaks of things that affected him, as when Florentius looked over his book in the service, and leant on his shoulder. When describing his companionship with Arnold, he writes : “We both contented ourselves with a little room and with one bed ;” again, what he writes of his friend shows the deep religiousness of his own nature : “Every morning about four, when the bell gave the sign, Arnold stood immediately awake, knelt at the bed and prayed for a short time, then he dressed himself quickly and hastened to the early mass. He loved quiet concealed places, so as not to be disturbed while at prayers, and the more earnestly he prayed the more quiet he was. Sometimes, when I could observe him closer, I was moved by his earnestness to pray myself.” The lovable nature of Thomas is shown in his life of Florentius, especially when he says in his deep gratitude : “If all should be silent, I could not be silent, but would sing of the kindnesses of Florentius for ever, for in fact for seven whole years

have I experienced the greatness of his kindnesses in my own knowledge and feelings."

Thomas has himself given an account of his arrival at Deventer; he says: "When I came to Deventer for the sake of prosecuting my studies in the years of my youth, I inquired the way I should take to the Canons Regular at Windesheim. And having there found my brother living with the said canons, I was induced by his counsel and encouragement to apply to that most reverend of men, Master Florentius, a vicar of the church of Deventer, and a devout priest, the sweet fragrance of whose fame had already reached the upper provinces, and already inspired me with a reverential love of him; since I frequently heard a great number of students speak well of him, and of the excellency of his instructions in Divine things. . . . When I came, therefore, into the presence of this reverend father, he, being at once moved with pity towards me, kept me for some little time with him in his own house, and there prepared and instructed me for the schools, giving me moreover such books as he thought I might stand in need of. Afterwards he obtained a hospitable reception for me into the house of a

certain honourable and devout matron, who showed much kindness both to me and to several other clerks."*

The name of the lady is not mentioned by Thomas, but it is supposed by Delprat to be Zwerdera. Thomas went to the public school at Deventer, where John Bohme was the rector. The latter, a rigid disciplinarian, was a great friend of Florentius, for whose sake he remitted the school fees due by Thomas. He was also a vicar of the principal church at Deventer, and directed the choir, in which Florentius took great interest. Thomas sang in this choir. We have unfortunately little account of the school, but we can get some idea of it from the description Busch gives of the neighbouring school at Zwolle, of which John Cele was the rector, and who was also a great friend of both Gerard and Florentius. There were there from eight hundred to a thousand scholars, divided into eight classes, with only two assistant masters, while grammar, logic, ethics, and philosophy were taught. Cele conducted the singing of the choir, and on Sundays and Saints' days expounded the Epistle for the day, and the Gospel. After afternoon service

* *Life of Florentius*, quoted by Kettlewell, I, 106.

he gave a lecture, and dictated to his scholars passages out of the writings of the Fathers. When Thomas subsequently went to Mount St. Agnes, he became a friend of this John Cele, and in his *Chronicle* he speaks very highly of him.

Seven years Thomas passed quietly in study and devotion at Deventer, when Florentius, who saw that notwithstanding his modesty and humility he was fitted for higher things, recommended him to take orders, and become a Canon Regular according to the rule of St. Augustine. This he could not refuse, and he prepared to accept the recommendation; but, being too modest to enter the chief house at Windesheim, which had then been founded for fourteen years, he started for Mount St. Agnes, of which his brother was then Prior, with a letter from Florentius desiring the Brethren to waive their rule that two brothers should not live in the same monastery; and at this convent, which was pleasantly situated near the town of Zwolle, he applied to be admitted as a *donatus*, and there spent five years of a novitiate, assuming the monastic dress on the sixth, though he did not then take the vows, from a sense of unworthiness and from modesty. He passed another year in meditation, in work, and in prayer,

and in the seventh year was ordained a priest, when he devoted himself chiefly to preaching and to the duties of the confessional.* He also employed his time in transcribing and in composing various treatises, among which are the four eventually known as the *Imitation of Christ*.

He has himself given us a full description of cloister life, and from his *Life of Florentius* we can obtain a fair picture of how he passed his time, how he thought, and how he acted. In his directions to the novices he recommends them "never to be altogether idle, but to be either reading or writing, or praying or meditating, or labouring on something for the good of the community." And this advice was in accordance with his own practice, for he was always diligent, and accom-

* Concerning the matter of the novitiate, Father Becker says that he was only received as a *donatus*, and that later on he resolved to be a monk. As he relates himself, he took the habit in 1406, a short time after the dispensation of the General Chapter that same year. Then began his year of probation, or his novitiate, and the following year he made his solemn profession.

The fact of the Fathers of Mount St. Agnes agreeing to ask the dispensation of a rule shows that they wished to retain Thomas at their convent, and may be taken as a mark of their esteem.

plished much work in composing and in transcribing. Some of the sermons which he preached to the novices are to be found among his works, and in the *Imitation* we find four chapters of the first book addressed to monks. Having a quick eye and a skilful hand, he accomplished much in copying, having written out for the use of his own monastery the Bible in four volumes, a mass book, the principal works of St. Bernard, besides making copies of his own works. We have no record of any illuminating having been done by Thomas, though Mr. Bradley thinks it possible that he might have done some simple work. Illuminating formed, however, one of the employments at the monastery of St. Agnes, and among the illuminators mentioned by Mr. Bradley in his *Dictionary of Miniaturists*, etc., is a namesake of Thomas, though not a relation, Thomas himself and his brother John being entered as copyists. Thomas attached great value to the work of the copyists, as the following quotations from his *Conciones* will show:—

“To transcribe works which Jesus Christ loves, by which the knowledge of Him is diffused, His precepts taught, and the practice of them inculcated, is a most useful employment. If he shall not lose

his reward who gives a cup of cold water to his thirsty neighbour, what will not be the reward of those who, by putting good works into the hands of those neighbours, open to them the fountains of eternal life? Blessed are the hands of our transcribers! Which of the writings of our ancestors would now be remembered if there had been no pious care bestowed in transcribing them?"*

For such work monasteries were necessary, as, unless men had retired from the world, the amount of labour done by the transcribers could never have been accomplished. We should be grateful to the monks not only for the preservation of the Scriptures, but for the vast mass of classical literature that might otherwise have been lost. How otherwise could have been saved the works of our own early authors, such as Chaucer?

We feel that now the need for monasteries has passed, and naturally think that Thomas's account of them as havens of rest is exaggerated; but we must remember that in his day they were like oases in the desert, for while all around was strife, in them was calm and peace. He thus writes :—

* Quoted by Kettlewell, i., 118.

"A well-founded cloister separated from the tumult of the world, adorned with many Brethren and with sacred books, is acceptable to God and to His saints. Such a place, it is piously believed, is pleasing to all that love God, and take a delight in hearing the things of God: because the cloister is the castle of the Supreme King and the palace of the Celestial Emperor prepared for the dwelling of religious persons, where they may faithfully serve God. . . . For this is none other—as we read and sing of—than the House of God in which to pray, the Court of God to offer praise; the Choir of God to sing unto Him; the Altar of God wherein to celebrate; the Gate of God whereby to enter Heaven; the Ladder of God to rise above the clouds. . . . As a noble city is preserved with walls and gates and bars, so also is the monastery of the religious with many devout Brethren, with sacred books, and with learned men. It is decorated with gems and precious stones to the praise of God, and to the honour of all His saints, who now rejoice in Heaven with Him, because they followed in the footsteps of His passion on earth."*

* *Doctrinale*, VII. 2, as quoted by Kettlewell, i., 424-28.

The Augustinians were more favourable to mysticism than any of the other orders of monks, which may be the cause of Gerard choosing the rule of St. Augustine, which is as follows, according to Kettlewell (vol. i., p. 442) :—

“ 1. To observe the fundamental law of love ; first towards God, then towards our neighbour, according to its just extent, and to imitate the example of the Mother Church of Jerusalem in union of heart, and sharing with others the goods we possess.

“ 2. To learn the lesson of humility, according to the most perfect pattern set forth in the life of Christ, and in that of His nearest and most faithful followers ; and especially in this, that the greatest among them should be as the youngest, and he that is chief as he that doth serve.

“ 3. To observe carefully the stated or canonical hours and times of prayer ; and to prepare both body and soul for it by due retirement, meditation, and fasting.

“ 4. To take care that the soul and the body be both fed at the same time, by a prudent appointment of some spiritual entertainment at meals, as by reading some sacred book, or by a conference on holy matters, or by singing some devout songs or canticles.

"5. To take charge of the sick and infirm wherever they be found, and so far as we are capable, and to do them all the service in our power for their bodily and spiritual welfare.

"6. To be without any affectation or singularity in dress, and in all other externals of life ; and to regard above all things the acquisition of internal purity, and the fashioning our lives into a conformity to the will of God.

"7. Humbly and affectionately to give and receive fraternal correction and admonition from one another, meekly to confess our faults one to another, gladly to submit ourselves to the reproof or chastisement of our superiors, and resolutely keep up the true discipline of the Gospel.

"8. To do all we possibly can for the general good and interest of the community ; to be diligent in our duties and callings, never to be idle, or to wander curiously about, and to be content with the distribution of the common funds, though not altogether so favourable to ourselves as might be expected.

"9. Not to neglect outward cleanliness and decency, but to look to the due discharge of outward things for the sake of the inward, and to take proper care of

the body for the sake of the soul both in health and sickness.

"10. To be obedient to our Superior for God's sake, to faithfully and kindly observe our relative duties towards the other members of the Society, to be ready to ask pardon and to forgive offences in the spirit of Christ our Lord, but not so as to weaken authority."

Such were the rules to which Thomas à Kempis was willing to submit, and such rules seem to breathe the same spirit as the *Imitation*.

Before taking the vows he had to renounce the world ;* he would then sign the deed of his profession, which was as follows : "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In the year of His birth 1406, and on the day of the Sacrament, I, Thomas of Kempen, do hereby profess my stedfast resolve, and the conversion of my ways, and obedience according to the rule of St. Augustine, before God and the whole heavenly court, in the presence of the Reverend Father John and other Fathers and Brethren of this congregation of Canons Regular, under the aforesaid rule. In surety thereof I have hereunto sub-

* The beautiful form used will be found in Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, etc., vol. ii., p. 19.

scribed my own hand with the year and day above written." The mass was said when he received the Sacrament, and after this he had to say three times, "Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy loving kindness ; O let me not be disappointed of my expectation." After some more versicles and the Lord's Prayer, he had to say three times the usual oath binding himself to perpetual continence, poverty, and obedience to the Prior and his successors.

After the conclusion of the service he received the kiss of peace from the Prior and from each of the Brethren in the choir.

We see by his life and writings that Thomas considered this no mere form of words, and that he meant to abide by them in the letter and in the spirit. He accepted religion in such a happy and cheerful spirit that his asceticism—for he was a real ascetic—seems little to have affected his nature, since he was never carried into extremes, as Henry Suso and some others had been.

His abstinence did not affect his health. He thoroughly believed in discipline, for not only does he practise it himself, but he recommends this virtue in his great work, as also in his *Life of a Good Monk*, where he writes—

"Bear violence patiently.
Be silent that thou mayst be wise.
Govern thy manners, cover thy ears.
Every day, every hour,
Resign thyself without delay."

A uniform tranquillity and complete peace of mind seemed natural and habitual to him ; he was by no means narrow-minded, for as in the *Imitation* we find a breadth of tolerance, so in one of his *Conciones* he says : "Jesus is not always to be found where we seek Him, but often where we least expect to find Him. Jesus Himself was at one time unknown to the multitude, and few perceived who He was and how great He was."

In his *Valley of Lilies* he recommends moderation as one of the most beautiful virtues, and, like mystics in general, he derives "all good from love, and all evil from its absence." He carefully distinguishes between knowledge and wisdom. The former is useless unless supported by wisdom. He believes, however, that study is necessary to attain this wisdom, for not only does he call for a blessing on those who are the means of spreading knowledge, but he seems to pronounce a curse on those who despise it. He says, "Woe to the priest who is unlearned and without the sacred books ; he is often a cause of

error to himself and to others. A priest without holy books is like a soldier without arms, a horse without a bridle, a ship without a rudder, a writer without pens, or a bird without wings."* He speaks also of the uselessness of a monastery without books. Though usually calm in his demeanour, he occasionally rose into enthusiasm, as it is said by one writer that "when he prayed his face was as if full of light ; he stood as if only the points of his feet touched the ground, as if his whole body wished to fly up to heaven, where his desire was centred."

His outward appearance corresponded with the gentleness of his inner nature. He had a broad forehead and thoughtful face ; his eyes were bright, and in spite of incessant use they retained their acuteness to extreme old age.

Few facts need mention in a life passed in quietness and peace. He was chosen sub-prior in 1425, an office he held but a short time, for soon after a quarrel took place over the election of the Archbishop of Utrecht, which resulted in the country being laid under an interdict, and himself and his companions driven from their monastery. During this exile he

* Quoted by Böhringer.

heard of his brother's illness, and hastened to comfort and nurse him. For fourteen months he was constantly beside John, attending assiduously to his wants until his death, in his sixty-seventh year, A.D. 1432. In the meantime the Brethren had returned to their monasteries, the Papal Interdict being removed, and as Thomas was absent they had chosen another sub-prior. When Thomas came back he took his place among them again as a simple monk. Soon after the Procurator died, and Thomas was chosen for this office, but he did not feel himself fit for this bursarship, as it required knowledge of temporal affairs, and with these he was not very conversant, so that he resigned in a very short time. In 1448 the Prior died and the sub-prior was advanced to his office, when Thomas was elected sub-prior a second time, and this post he held until he quietly passed away, A.D. 1471, in his ninety-first year, surrounded by loving hearts and willing hands, as he had gained the love of all. That he had gained their respect is shown by the way he is spoken of by his contemporaries, and by the fact of his having been asked to write the lives of his friends. In dying he left to the world a legacy in his writings, especially in the *Imitation*, which is described by

Franciscus Tolensis as "those sentences which, having been drawn from the ancients, we have examined and certified as by Thomas." This Franciscus Tolensis who was a Canon Regular, and lived at Mount St. Agnes, wrote the life of Thomas, as he says, "for the love and reverence he had for him, and because through him the monastery had become famous." Hardenberg, in his *Life of Wessel*, also says that many were drawn to this monastery by the fame of Thomas. In the Munich Library is a MS. (*Cod. Monac.*, 351, A. 163) which is supposed to be written by Hardenberg, in which he says that he was shown by the monks many writings of that most pious man Thomas à Kempis; there were with many others that golden work *De Imitatione Christi*. We have seen how he was loved and admired by his contemporaries. Since then he has been loved through and for his work, and he is worthy of all honour, for what he taught that he practised. As Mr. Kettlewell writes :* "He shows us how the life of a Christian in ordinary circumstances may be made lovely by the cultivation of the spiritual life; how a lowly life may become sublime and

* *Thomas à Kempis*, etc., i., 38.

heavenly, very near and like unto Christ, and that however humble and retired our lot in the world may be, however insignificant and unnoticed among men we be, we may, if we will, like him rise by the grace of God to a much higher elevation in holiness of life and devotion to Christ than is to be usually found."





CHAPTER VI.

OTHER WORKS OF THOMAS À KEMPIS.

"The voice of books is indeed one, but it teacheth not all men alike."—*Imit.* III. 43.

"Make me ever busy in good work."

—*Imit.* III. 55.

Tis often said that the writings of Thomas à Kempis are weak, and quite unworthy of the hand of the writer of the *Imitation*. Although there is some truth in such a statement, there are many people who hold that it could hardly be made by any one who had read and studied them; in fact, that the supposed weakness of these writings is greatly exaggerated.

The Abbé Migne speaks highly of them. He writes that "in his minor works, Thomas always shows himself as the paternal master of the novices, and this is what gives them such a charm. With the canon of Zwolle, the mystic life is everywhere the aim and the supreme

goal. He will not speak much of action, because he treats all as children ; but as soon as he feels that he is not kept back by the necessity of instruction, he breaks out into hymn more and more ; the poem then becomes as a parable to teach one to live according to the precepts, and to help one to retain it in one's memory ; after which it turns to prayer, mounting to God, as in his *Soliloquy of the Soul*, which he wrote for his own edification."

Böhringer, the Church historian, after claiming "the *De Imitatione* as the culminating point of all his treatises, for it is the highest, richest, and purest of all," acknowledges that "the other works are inferior in merit and beauty ;" but he adds, "nevertheless we find there a multitude of parallels and of harmonies that may be called the material—the stones of construction which have been employed to build the grand edifice of the *Imitation*."^{*} Of the merit of these writings, the eminent religious archæologist, Father Kraus, thinks so highly, that he commenced an edition of them,[†] in the preface to which he says : "Since the works of the Vene-

* *Kirche Christi*, p. 700.

† *Thomæ à Kempis Opera Omnia, Recogn. F. X. Kraus*, i. Opuscula, 18mo. Treves, 1868.

rable Thomas à Kempis have been for many years a delight to me, a recreation in a wonderful manner among the graver studies and troubles of life, I often grieved that, although the *Imitation* was in the hands and mouths of almost all Christians, the other works of this author were mostly unknown and neglected." Many other writers have thought the same, and have said that the study of them makes one think more highly of the author, for they often serve as a commentary to his more famous work. It is, however, useless to deny a certain inferiority in them to the *magnum opus*. At the same time, many are of considerable merit, and in them are to be found germs of thought which have a complete expression in the more famous treatise, as may be seen in the following examples :—

In the *Soliloquy* the sentence, "Let the fallacious glory of the world fly from me," is better expressed in the *Imitation* by "Let not the world and its brief glory deceive me." "Teach me to give myself to Thee before all things" in the former, is "Give all to God, without whom man has nothing" in the latter. "This is my whole desire, that my heart may be united to Thee," is not so terse, but has a greater depth than "One thing is necessary,

that one thing I seek." The greatness and importance of love is much spoken of in the *Imitation*. "Bind me to Thyself by the inseparable chain of love," is rendered in the *Soliloquy*, "Let me be joined to God by the chain of intimate love;" and "In temptation and tribulation man is proved how much he loves," by "It is necessary that temptation should show how true is the virtue of love."

It is interesting to trace the same thought, differently expressed, in several of his works: "Love is sufficient of itself" in the *Soliloquy*, "Nothing is better or more salutary than to love and praise God" in the *Valley of Lilies*; or "Love unites the will of man with the will of God" in the *Sermons to Novices*, becomes, in the *Imitation*, "If thou seekest nothing else than the will of God and the good of thy neighbour, thou shalt have internal liberty."* The same idea that is expressed in the *Sermons*, "It is not the hood that makes the monk, for that can be worn by an ass," is certainly better rendered in the *Imitation* as "The wearing of a religious habit, and the shaving of the crown, do little profit, but change of manners and perfect mortification of

* II. 4.

the passions make a true religious man.”* Ullman considers that the *Hortulus Rosarum* is very little inferior to the *Imitation*. We can see the resemblance by these two sentences : “Solitude with silence profits,” and “The royal way of coming to Christ is to conquer one’s own will,” which are taken from it ; while parallel passages from the *Imitation* are : “In silence and rest the devout mind profits, and learns the hidden things of Scripture;”† and, “There is no other way to life and true internal peace than the way of the holy cross and of daily self-denial.”‡ Some passages appear in the *Imitation* word for word, as in others of his works. Two of such passages appear in his hymns, from which they must have been quoted, as it is not probable that a quotation from a prose writing could have been inserted in a poem without alteration.

There are, in the Royal Library at Brussels, two volumes of Thomas’s works, written by himself. The first is the famous MS. of 1441, and contains thirteen treatises, the first four of which form what we call the *Imitation*. The fifth opens with a text from Psalm ii. 19, *Vulgate* version,—“Learn discipline, lest the Lord

I. 17.

† I. 20.

‡ II. 12.

be angry," serving as its key-note. In the first chapter, the author shows the necessity of discipline, in the second its difficulties, in the third that true conversion consists not in the mere change of dress, but in the real turning to God. In chapters four to eight, discipline is shown in its various forms ; such as the care of the heart and of inward reflection ; on the care of what one hears, and on labour as a means of improvement ; on solitude, and on public prayer. Next, in chapters nine to twelve, are shown the virtues springing from it ; and in chapters thirteen to sixteen the aids to discipline.

The sixth treatise, which is an epistle to a certain Canon Regular, bears so close a resemblance to the *Imitation* in its punctuation, rhyme, and rhythm, that Gence—who was one of the strongest of the advocates of the claim of the Chancellor Gerson to the authorship of that work—thinks that it was also written by that statesman, notwithstanding that this letter simply gives advice to a monk concerning his duties.

The seventh depicts the spiritual life that should accompany life in a cloister.

The eighth is a confession of weakness.

The ninth recommends humility, not only as a duty but as a blessing.

In the tenth the author, after quoting St. Paul, speaks of the necessity of mortifying the body, and shows from St. John what peace is thereby gained. He concludes with a prayer.

In the eleventh, resignation to the will of God is recommended as the best means of attaining a peaceful life.

There is a strong mystical feeling in the twelfth, which is a meditation on raising the mind to heavenly things, and thereby attaining the highest good.

The thirteenth and concluding treatise is a short admonition for spiritual exercises, in order to rise from the outward form to the inward feeling ; from the lower to the higher, from the bodily to the spiritual nature ; for which purpose three things are necessary to every devout person—prayer, reading, and work. They are to be exercised at first by oneself alone, and then with others, “until the choir becomes as a paradise.”

It will be observed that all the treatises in this volume are of a similar nature, with nothing special in the first four to distinguish them from the others in the volume. There is the same spirit, the same style, also the same rhythm, and although the twelfth is not so practical as the others, there is nothing uncommon in

the meditations of a mystic becoming a little ecstatic; but there can be little doubt in the mind of the unprejudiced reader that they are all composed by the same writer. In fact, in an ordinary case there could have been no dispute about the matter. The author writes one tract after another, and after concluding the volume makes a list of its contents, mentioning the thirteen treatises one after the other with no other observation; and then at the end of the little volume he adds, "completed and finished." He did not say he had written and composed them, as *ama nesciri* was the motto of the author, and every one who then used the work would know who was the author. The style adopted by Thomas à Kempis in his treatises is concise, the sentences are written like proverbs, and they abound in assonances with occasional rhyme and rhythm, breaking occasionally into prayers and ejaculations. The second volume from the pen of Thomas was completed in 1456. It contains thirteen sermons and meditations, many passages of which resemble the *Imitation*. We quote two passages to show this resemblance. One: "Thou must study from thy whole heart to conform thyself to Him," is like to one in the first chapter of the *Imitation*: "He

that wishes to fully understand the words of Christ must study to conform his whole life to Him." The other : "Who is fit to enter the kingdom of heaven? He who despises the kingdom of the world," is almost identical with "This is the highest wisdom, to strive for the heavenly kingdom by despising the world." Besides these sermons and meditations there are a few small tracts. The style in the sermons differs from that of the treatises in being more rhetorical and full of pictures, among which the author likes to speak of the flowers. Some virtues are likened to the red roses in the garden of Jesus, others to the white lilies which are "planted in the valley of humility by the Lord Jesus, and are sweetly watered by the dew of His Spirit." The style of the *Meditations* is considered by Böhringer to be "naïve, charming, and thoughtful." A third volume from the pen of Thomas à Kempis is in the University of Louvain. It contains the thirty sermons to Novices and the life of St. Lydewig. This MS. is partly of paper and partly of parchment, and is of great interest, as in several places the author has pasted strips of paper or parchment over the original writing, on which strips he has written alterations of the original, thus showing the design of the author to

make a new edition, especially as there are leaves inserted in various parts of the MS.

For the various other works of Thomas we have not the originals, and must therefore trust to copies. A copy of the *Soliloquium Animæ*, a work in twenty-four chapters, very little inferior to the *Imitation*, is in Brussels, and this MS. has all the peculiarities of punctuation, rhyme, etc., which are found in the latter work. The title of the first chapter, "On the Desire of a Soul Seeking God," gives an apt description of the whole work. This work has often been translated, and has been placed sometimes as a fourth book to the *Imitation* instead of the original fourth (or third in the Brussels MS.), on the Eucharist, which is rather obnoxious to some extreme Protestants. Next to the *Imitation* this is the best known of Thomas's works. We give a passage from it to compare with one in the *Imitation*. "Let him who loves rejoice; but let him fear who does not love," is rendered in the *Imitation*: "He that loveth God with all his heart is neither afraid of death, nor of punishment, nor of judgment, nor of hell, for perfect love gives secure access to God" (I. 24). Hirsche gives an account of this work, saying that it forms three divisions, the first of which

shows the soul seeking God and pondering the unavoidableness of the Divine judgment. The second division points to the sinners who boast of their sins, not considering their latter end. Their present position and future state are described, on which follows an exhortation to repentance. The third returns to the soul seeking God again, as the result of pondering the Divine judgment, in an earnest looking on death and a prayer for strength to repent, which is the preparation for a happy death. One of the treatises previously mentioned, *On the Elevation of the Mind*, resembles it, as does also the third book of the *Imitation*.

We have mentioned the resemblance of passages of the *Soliloquy* to the *Imitation*. We now quote three more:—

“Love and prefer the glory of God in all honour, let it be done.”
Soliloquy.
 “If it be to Thy things.”
Imit., III. 15.

“Teach me to give myself to Thee before all things.”
Soliloquy.
 “Give all to God, without whom man has nothing.”
Imit., III. 7.

“He who has the grace of spiritual strength can subjugate more quickly the sinful movements of the flesh.”
Soliloquy.
 “Strengthen me with heavenly courage, lest the old man, the miserable flesh not yet subject to the spirit, get the upper hand.”
Imit., III. 20.

The Garden of Roses and the *Valley of Lilies* are next in importance. They are inferior to the *Soliloquy*, and as they are more especially intended for the monks, they are much less read. They resemble one another, and also the other works which we have previously described. The following passages from the *Garden of Roses* will show the kind of sentences found there.

"Reading about God is good, prayer to God is better, but working for God is best."

"Blessed is he who orders all his words and all his deeds to the praise of God."

"Where there is peace and concord there is God and all good things. Where there is strife and dissension there is the devil and all evil. Conquer pride and you will find great peace."

"It is delightful to hear good things, but it is more praiseworthy to labour for them."

The following is almost identical with one in the *Imitation* :—

"Christ has many lovers and companions of His table, but few followers of His abstinence," is as it stands in the *Hortulus*, VII.

"Jesus finds many companions of His table, few of His abstinence," in the *Imitation*, II.

In the *Valley of Lilies* is a chapter recommending the reading of Scripture: "Read freely the canonical Scriptures : and attend to the expositions of the learned with diligence, and try to understand."

"God attends more to the compunction of heart than to the clamour of a loud voice," is in a chapter on prayer. When speaking of the Divine consolation in tribulation, the author says : " Unless it was useful and healthy for our souls to suffer and to be troubled in the world God would not permit it."

One of the treatises is in the *Three Tabernacles*, which are meant to be symbols of Poverty, Humility, and Patience. It is supposed to be an early production, being in places rather fanciful. This is one of the works which in parts is childish, and gives rise to the idea that the author of such a work could not be the author of the *Imitation*. We must, however, acknowledge that the author of this last work has no humour, and such men fail often to see the difference between childishness and childlikeness. A modern instance of such a case is exemplified by Victor Hugo, who at one time writes in a tone of true pathos, showing the highest genius ; while his

admirers cannot deny that at other times he sinks into bathos. There are, however, some good passages in the treatise. Here is one : " My peace is in much patience ; " which resembles, " Thy peace will be in much patience," from the *Imitation*, III. 25.

There are several other minor religious works, among which are his *Sermons to the Brethren*, in which the author tries to solve the question as to the right way of spending our earthly life as a preparation for the future heavenly one. It is probably an early work.

His chief historical works are the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes* and the eleven lives of brethren, the principal of which are those of Gerard Groot and of Florentius. These lives are of great interest, from the passages in which the author relates their sayings, sayings which we find in the *Imitation* either in the same form or with little variation. Böhringer writes that in these biographies of the great men of the Windesheim circle we see " the ideas current in this circle, and in them is the same spirit of proverbial wisdom. This spirit has found its noblest speaker in Thomas."

There are also a few poems from his pen, principally hymns ; they are not of a high class of poetry, but of interest from

the rhythm having to be found in the accentuation, and not in the quantity. They are also interesting from the fact of Thomas having made a quotation from one of them in the *Imitation*; and they also give an idea of the sort of rhythm which he favoured, and which is to be seen from time to time in his longer work. The following opinion of Duffield in his *Latin Hymn Writers* is of interest :—

“ Most of his poetry lacks the inspiration which characterizes his best prose. He is a poet in prose and a prosy poet, and writes in verse because he has been required to fill up some empty place in the hymn list of his monastery. His acquaintance with the hymn-writer’s art is bounded by his daily familiarity with the hymns of his breviary. But in this hymn” (“Adstant angelorum chori”) “on the joys of heaven he, for once, struck the right key, although even here he shows some stiffness in his joints, like a monk more used to a seat in the scriptorium than to the saddle of Pegasus.”

Father Rosweyde, a good scholar, and one of the chief students of the works of à Kempis, says : “ As a rose has the perfume of a rose, so also is the *Imitation* like the other writings of Thomas à Kempis.” In order to show that it is so, and that,

as Dean Milman says, "these works are absolutely the same in thought, in language, and in style," we quote a chapter of the *Imitation*, and place beside it passages from his other works. We have chosen this chapter (Book I., chap. v.) partly for its brevity, and partly to show a passage from a sermon to the novices which exhibits that weakness which is supposed to pervade the works of Thomas. We have taken these passages from a little work of the late Father Gerlach,* in which, after each chapter of the *Imitation*, he gives *considerationes* from the other works to illustrate it.

"The truth is to be sought for in the sacred Scriptures, not in eloquence. All sacred Scripture ought to be read in the same spirit in which it was written. To seek rather for profit in the Scriptures than for subtlety of discourse."

"Whatever things are written in the Old and New Covenant are written to teach our souls that we may serve God faithfully by hating evil, and by cleaving to God our highest happiness, with a pure heart, whole and perfect here and hereafter."

Valley of Lilies.

"Thus we ought to read devout and simple books as willingly as

"The Word of God and the doctrine of Christ are the light of life, the

* *Thomæ à Kempis De Imitatione Christi libri quatuor, et considerationes ex ceteris opusculis collecti adj. H. Gerlach : 12mo, Freiburg, 1889.*

high and profound ones. Let not the authority of the writer offend thee, whether he was of small or great learning ; but let the love of pure truth draw thee to read. Do not seek who has said this, but attend to what is said."

salvation of the world, the gate of heaven, food for the soul, joy to the heart of one loving God above all things."

Doctrinale.

"The oftener one hears and reads, and attentively considers and ponders on the Gospel words, so much more will one gain in virtues."

Sermon to Novices,
XXX.

"Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord endureth for ever (remains for eternity)."

"The word of man passes away, but the Word of God remains eternal and unchangeable."

*On the Elevation of
the Soul.*

"God speaks to us in various ways without respect of persons."

"Truth is not to be despised, howeversimply it is expressed."

Garden of Roses.

"Our own curiosity often hinders us in the reading of the Scriptures, when we wish to understand and to discuss where we should simply pass on. If you wish to drink profitably read humbly, simply, and faithfully, nor ever wish for the name of learn-

"Study at first to learn humbly, and to perform little things, and God will give thee greater things to understand more quickly if it would be useful to thee. He who knows and reads many things, if he does not do what he has known and learnt,

ing. Ask freely and depart empty and hungry
hear quickly the words from a full table."
of the saints ; let not *Garden of Roses.*
the parables of the elders
displease thee, for they
were not produced without cause."

"A certain woman who loved those things which are God's, used to visit frequently the church, and to hear freely the preaching of the Word of God. Once, when coming out of church, she was asked what good she had retained of the sermon. Answering briefly, she said, 'I know not how to tell you much; but I heard well, and retain this, that I am unwilling to sin.' She answered well and prudently, as she had carried with her the fruit of a good discourse, that she should sin no more. Hence our Saviour in the Gospel says to the devout woman, 'Happy are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.'

Sermon to Novices,
XXX.

It is to Sommalius that we must give

the credit of collecting the works together, and his edition, which first appeared in Antwerp, was reprinted several times. Dr. Hirsche has shown us that he is not correct in all cases as to the genuineness of some of the works, but it is the only edition to which we can refer until Dr. Hirsche publishes his, for which he has issued two volumes of prolegomena. One proof that these works of Thomas à Kempis were highly valued is that the first book printed in Holland was a volume of his Sermons.

With regard to translations, a little book, called the *Lesser Imitation*, gives a good selection of the minor works ; it, unfortunately, gives no reference to the places from which the quotations are taken. The *Soliloquy of the Soul* is to be had either alone or with the *Garden of Roses*. According to Dr. Cruise, there have been published in Dublin translations of *The Valley of Lilies*, *The Three Tabernacles*, and *Meditations* under the title of *The Christian Traveller*. *The Garden of Roses* and the *Manuale Parvolorum* have also been published, by Burns, Oates, & Co., 1888.

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CHAPTER VII.

HIRSCHÉ'S INVESTIGATIONS.

"We ask how much a man hath done :
Was he a good copyist, a good singer, a hard
worker?"—*Imit. III. 31.*

SOMMALIUS was fully fitted to edit a good edition of the works of A Kempis. He was born at Dinant in 1534, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1551, when he was received by Ignatius Loyola himself. He taught Greek for some time at Cologne, and then helped to found a college at Dinant, becoming its first rector, which office he held until he was asked to go to Douai. He died at Valenciennes in 1619. He made his edition from MSS. which he procured himself, and it contains all the works except the *Chronicon Montis S. Agnetis*, which was published subsequently by Rosweyde. Sommalius divided the work into chapters, with headings in

accordance with the MSS., but paid no attention to the peculiar punctuation of the author; and later, about 1600, he divided the chapters into paragraphs as he thought fit.

Dr. Carl Hirsche, of Hamburg, desiring to publish a fresh edition of these works, began to study the MSS. for that purpose, when he perceived that Sommalius had often spoiled the meaning of the chapters by his arbitrary divisions, while he thought he had found out what was the author's own intention by remarking the existence of a system of punctuation which had been unnoticed by previous editors. He has not yet commenced the publication of the works themselves, though, as already stated, he has brought out two volumes of prolegomena,* in which he discusses the merits of the various works and their genuineness. He considered this punctuation, which he discovered in all the works, of so much importance that he edited an edition of the *Imitation*, arranged and punctuated in accordance with the author's copy of 1441. This system of punctuation is thus described by Dr. Ruelens, in his preface to the facsimile edition of the *Imitation* :—“The full stop followed by a

* Hirsche, *Prolegomena*, i., 1873 ; ii., 1883.

small capital ; the full stop followed by a large capital ; the colon followed by a small letter ; the usual sign of interrogation ; and lastly an unusual sign, the *clavis* or *flexa* used in the musical notation of the period." It was in studying this that Dr. Hirsche saw the importance of the punctuation for the correct reading, as it shows the proper pauses which should be made ; the punctuation being more for rhetorical than for grammatical use.* He also found that there was thus produced a peculiar rhythm, and in some parts rhyme, which helps us to see a reason for applying to the *Imitation* the name of *Musica Ecclesiastica*, by which it is designated in the majority of MSS. in this country, and in a few on the Continent ; a name also given to it by a contemporary chronicler (A. de But).

Dr. Hirsche thus describes the punctuation :—"In the Thomas Autograph a system of punctuation is brought into use which is especially rare in the Middle Ages, and only used among the Brethren of Common Life, and even among them

* In speaking of this punctuation, it is not intended to say that such punctuation is wanting in other works, for MSS. were often punctuated for reading, as is our version of the Psalms, but not so exactly as this.

it is not the usual one, yet it is the only one prevailing in all the undoubted genuine works of Thomas, which are written by himself.”*

Dr. Hirsche discovered this punctuation in several MSS. of the *Imitation* written by other people, even in copies of single books, as also in the other works of Thomas, and in some works of other writers that have been bound up with them. Among other works with this system of punctuation are two copies of the *Vulgate* and Busch’s *Windesheim Chronicle*. In the University Library of Ghent there is a MS. of the *Soliloquium*, in which the last three chapters have this punctuation, while the first twenty-two use a different system.

That the punctuation is of importance is seen by the fact that by it errors, which were not in the older versions, and which have been made by several translations of modern times, can be corrected.

Hirsche points out as a specimen the passage in the eleventh chapter of the fourth book—“Here are the two tables set on the one side and on the other;” a stop now comes, and then, “in the treasury.” In most translations the passage

* Vol. i., page 92.

has no stop, but runs on, which seems natural, but it is not in accordance with the meaning of the author, which was that both tables were in the treasury.

In the Wolfenbüttel Library there is a MS. which contains, among several religious treatises of Thomas, the meditations of a Carthusian called Guigo. In this tract the scribe has followed the system of punctuation which was used in the other treatises, but notwithstanding the simplicity of the style he has not been able to avoid making many errors.

"That the author of the *Imitation* wished to rhyme," writes Hirsche, "is shown in the plainest manner in many places by the sequence of the words chosen by him."* Silbert (Vienna, 1828) notices the great preference shown for poetical sounds, a fact perceived by Ullman, Böhringer, and other German writers. Duffield speaks of the *Imitation* as a "Christian poem, not only in substance, but in form." Even Mons. Tamizey-Larroque, an opponent of the claims of Thomas, speaks of his mania for writing *rhymed prose* as an objection to his being the author of the *Imitation*, not perceiving

* Vol. i., page 124.

that the same thing occurs in it. This may be plainly seen in the edition by Hirsche, in which the lines are divided, arranged, and punctuated in accordance with the Brussels MS. of 1441. In the *Chronicon Montis St. Agnetis* many rhymes are to be found, as also in the works of Bonaventura, of St. Bernard, and in those of the St. Victors, as well as in some other Middle Age authors, especially in such works as were intended for popular religious edification.

Amongst such works are to be mentioned the Sequences, one of which is quoted by Mr. Kettlewell in his *Thomas à Kempis*, etc., vol. i., page 335, and the most famous of which is the *Stabat Mater* of Jacopo di Todi, so well known to us by the music of Rossini. The famous *Dies Irae* is also one. "All Sequences," says Schulting, in his *Bibliotheca Ecclesiastica*, "are wanting in the law of metre, and are therefore also called proses. However, they are mostly called Sequences, as they follow the melody which is in the Alleluiah." The Gradual was a portion of a psalm sung after the Epistle, which was followed by an Alleluiah, the last syllable of which was repeated and lengthened in order to give the priest time to pass from the altar, where he had read

the Epistle, to the rood-loft, from which in olden times the Gospel was read, as is mentioned in the Sarum Missal ; and it was to give words for the meaningless "ah" that the Sequence was invented. The credit of this invention is generally given to Notker, Abbot of St. Gallen, though he can hardly have been the first to use it, as he mentions finding one himself in a monastery. These Sequences were in rhythm, but usually had little or no rhyme. There were said to have been between thirty and one hundred in use in Germany before the Council of Trent, though the numbers had been limited, first at the Council of Cologne and then at the Council of Rheims. There are now only five in the Roman Missal, and these are in use only on special occasions, since they are no more needed, as the priest does not now leave the altar to read the Gospel.*

In the *Imitation* the rhythm is also of more importance than the rhyme, as—

" Nihil dulcius est amore ?
Nihil fortius,
Nihil altius nihil latius,

* In the fifth volume of Daniel's *Thesaurus* is an essay on Sequences by Rev. J. M. Neale, who also published a volume of *Sequences*, as well as wrote some in English.

Nihil jucundius nihil plenius nec melius
 in cælo et in terra?
 Quia amor ex Deo natus est."

—III. 5.

And again—

“ Aeterna querere,
 Aeterna sapere;
 honores fugere,
 scandale sufferre?
 omnem spem in me ponere,
 extra me nil cupere:
 et super omnia me ardenter amare.”

—III. 43.

In the first of these we see the repetition of the word *nihil*, a repetition which is a peculiarity of Thomas à Kempis, both in the *Imitation* and in his other works. In the twenty-fourth chapter of the first book we have the word *Tunc* repeated seventeen times, and in the seventh chapter of the fourth book *Tam* is repeated thirty-seven times. In a chapter of the *De laude Bonæ congregationis*, quoted by Father Becker, to show the rhythm, the word *ibi* is repeated forty-four times.

“ Ibi invenit quod timet :
 ibi habet quod diligit :
 et sic ex omnibus proficit.
 Ibi alterius correptio,
 ejus fit admonitio.
 Ibi alienum periculum
 proprium efficitur speculum.”

Mr. Addis tells us in his *Catholic Dictionary* that the Carthusians and Cistercians were praised for not using the Sequences in their services ; but may they not have used them on other occasions ? Kettlewell quotes the case of a Sequence being sung at the deathbed of a brother ; may not parts of the *Imitation* have seemed to them suitable for such times, and have been adopted by them for singing, as it is in MSS. belonging to Carthusian houses that we mostly find the name *Musica Ecclesiastica* ? They were among the first outside the Windesheim circle to have copies, as friendly relations were maintained between the two orders, since it was to the Carthusians that Gerard Groot owed his conversion, though he thought a simple rule, such as the Augustinian, fitted for his followers. As the book was not only anonymous, but also without a title, they would probably be induced by its rhythm and rhyme to give it the name of Church Music ; while others, not heeding the music, would call it by the heading of its first chapter, which has remained the general title ever since.

Hirsche has studied carefully many MSS., and the result of his examinations has been that the best MSS. are those which are most like the Thomas

Autograph, and that these are the MSS. which have come from German and Dutch monasteries, and have been written by members of the Brothers of Common Life, or by monks in sympathy with them, and that the MS. itself is invaluable. This codex is written with extraordinary care, as Rosweyde observes that "it would be difficult to find in it a single fault." However, Hirsche discovered that there were erasures here and there, and that in many places single words are marked out; that often the arrangement of the words is altered by signs; that words originally omitted are written above or in the margin; yet, notwithstanding all these improvements, which were the result of repeated careful supervision, the whole MS. is a true model of correctness. There seems to be no doubt that these are the improvements of the original writer, and as this writer was a perfect scribe, and one who had a reputation for his exactness, he must have been the author as well, for Thomas à Kempis, who was known to be thoroughly modest, was most unlikely to alter the work of another. This MS. also shows many signs of having been much used, which led Hirsche to think that it had been the author's constant companion,

and, therefore, of the highest importance in settling any question of arrangement, or of correctness of the text.

Two translations have lately appeared, both anonymous, and both following Hirsche's version; one issued by the Christian Knowledge Society, which only follows the arrangement into paragraphs; the other published by Mr. Elliot Stock, which is metrical, thus in accordance with the sentence of Adrian de But, the *Qui sequitur* in metre. A third translation has also appeared, not only in metre, but in rhyme, by Dean Carrington.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONTROVERSY.

"Be equipped for the fight if thou wilt have the victory.

Without conflict thou canst not attain unto the crown of patience."—*Imit.* III. 19.

HE question naturally occurs, Why should any dispute have arisen concerning the authorship of the *Imitation*, considering the strong claims of Thomas à Kempis?

Several causes led to it; but the anonymity of the majority of the MSS., and the zeal for the honour of their order felt by many monks, were the two principal ones.

As acknowledged by Mabillon, Thomas was almost universally considered the author until 1604, in which year there appeared a work by Don Pedro Manriquez, in which it was asserted that in the *Conciones*, a work of Bonaventura's, there were quotations from the *Imitation*, and

"a devout little book, *De Imitatione*," was even mentioned in it by name. Now if this was true, and if the work was really by Bonaventura, the *Imitation* could not have been written by A Kempis, as he lived more than a hundred years later than the "seraphic doctor." It was, however, subsequently found out that the *Conciones* was not the work of that divine, but of a much later writer, whose writings had been bound up with them. However, doubt as to the authorship had thereby been instilled into the minds of some, and the discovery by Father Rossignoli of the Arona MS., which was undated, and bore the names of the Abbé John Gesen as the author of the first book, of the Abbé John Gessen and John Gersen of the fourth, opened a controversy which is apparently endless. As the College of the Jesuits at Arona, where the MS. was discovered, had previously been a Benedictine abbey, Father Rossignoli jumped to the conclusion that this MS. must have been written by a Benedictine, and that it was a relic from the old Benedictine Library, instead of making proper researches, when he would have found that the MS. was presented to the Jesuit Library by Father Maggioli, who brought it from Genoa in 1574. Canon Santini

observes that if the truth regarding this MS. and regarding the work attributed to Bonaventura could have been made known immediately, no controversy would have arisen ; but the letter of Father Rosweyde, who wrote from Antwerp in 1615, arrived too late, and consequently the myth of a Benedictine Gersen arose, a myth which still has supporters in Italy, though scarcely anywhere else. The *Imitation* having appeared anonymously, and even without a title,—*ama nesciri* being the motto of the Augustinian canons,—many MSS. had no name attached to them, and some received any name which the copyist fancied, such as that of one of the most famous men known to him ; and as the Chancellor Gerson was then one of the most prominent theologians, his name was consequently put to many MSS. The names of St. Bernard, Bonaventura, Kalkar, François de Sales, Thomas Aquinas, are all affixed to various MSS. ; but, notwithstanding this, the majority of the early MSS. have the name of Thomas à Kempis.

Seven MSS. bear the name of St. Bernard, who was considered the originator of the mysticism of the Middle Ages ; and between 1480 and 1500 as many as twelve editions were printed as his—which was not unnatural, when we consider how like

in spirit the *Imitatio* is to his writings. Two MSS. have the name of Bonaventura, as there was thought to be a resemblance to his works.

As with the MSS. so with the early printed copies—many printers put a popular name to their edition to make it sell ; but with these also the majority bear the name of A Kempis, and two which have the name of Gerson on the title contain the information at the end of the work that it is not really his, but that of a Canon Regular.

Dr. Arthur Loth calculates that of the supposed two hundred MSS., three-quarters are German, France possessing only thirty-two, and Italy twenty. If the author was French or Italian, how is it that the majority of MSS. are not in either of these countries? In fact, all the dated MSS. before 1450 are of German or Dutch origin, with the exception of one at Padua, dated 1436 ; and the majority of them can be traced to houses connected with Windesheim. It is not uncommon for disputes to arise about the authorship of other works ; even such a well-known work as the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas has been attributed to other writers.

Zeal is not always united with discretion, and the zeal which Dom Cajetan had for

his order,* the Benedictines, carried him far when he invented the personage of an abbot of Vercelli called Gersen, whose portrait he thought he had found in the representation of a monk in the initial letter of an undated MS., which is considered by all experts to be a late one of the fifteenth century. The very existence of such an abbot is mythical (notwithstanding that a statue has been erected in his honour), as he is not mentioned in the List of Abbots of Vercelli, which was drawn up by Mandelli in 1858, nor in the archives of the Abbey of St. Stephen's. And there is really nothing known of him. He is said to have been born about 1180, to have been a soldier for some years, to have entered the order of the Benedictines in 1210, to have become Abbot of St. Stephen's at Vercelli, to have filled a chair of Canon Law, and have died about 1245; but not one of these supposed facts can be proved, as there is no reliable authority for any of them.

If this Gersen had written this book in the beginning of the thirteenth century, how can we account for the fact that there

* His zeal went so far as to claim Thomas Aquinas as a Benedictine, and to say that the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola were only a poor copy of a work by a Spanish Benedictine.

is no mention of the work, nor are there any dated MSS. of it, in either the thirteenth or fourteenth century, while they abound in the fifteenth? The claims of Gersen have been advanced from time to time by Robert Quatremaire and various Benedictines, but with little effect. All their endeavours to induce Cardinal Richelieu to put the name of their mythic abbot to the edition of the *Imitation* published by him failed to persuade that statesman.

His claims were, however, supposed to be considerably advanced by the advocacy of Chevalier de Gregory, who, on finding the *De Advocatis* MS., wished to assert its great antiquity; and in order to prove that it was in existence in the thirteenth century brought forward a *Diarium* of the Avogrado family, in which it was stated that the MS. belonged to them. It did not, however, take much trouble to prove that this *Diarium* was a forgery. Even Mons. Renan, whose sympathies are with Gersen, accuses the Chevalier of *trop de zèle*. Herr Hirsche has carefully examined this, as well as other MSS., and states that the MS. itself is a very faulty one; and this is proved by experts (for it is undated) to be one of the latest, for "while the initial letters retain the Gothic

type, the small ones are in the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century; and, what is still more interesting, it shows in its capitals the transition from the Renaissance to the ugly mixture of the Rococo. Father Becker, who has also examined the question of MSS., agrees with Hirsche, and adds that "there is absolutely no proof that a single Italian MS. is older than the second half of the fifteenth century,"* while, as the *De Meditatione Cordis* is in this same codex, it could not be older. The latest exponent of the claims of Gersen is Wolfsgruber, but though he has written an elaborate book on his life and work in 268 pages, he cannot fill more than fourteen with an account of his life.† Archdeacon Farrar, in his lecture on the *Companions of the Devout Life*, tersely sums up the case as follows:—"Whose very existence is problematical, and of whom, at any rate, we know nothing whatever beyond the syllables of his name, and whose claims, as founded on dubious manuscripts, confused orthography, and misread dates, may now be considered to be set at rest."

* *Précis Historiques*, xxxviii., p. 146.

† Wolfsgruber (C.), *G. Gersen, sein Leben u. sein Werk.*

The principal writers in his favour are Father Rossignoli, 1605 ; Cajetan, 1616 ; Bellarmine, 1630 ; Mabillon, 1677 ; Gregory, 1827 ; and Wolfsgruber, 1880.

The question of the authorship was referred to the French parliament, but after a careful examination of the whole question they *forbade* in 1652 the printing of the *Imitation* under the name of Gersen, but *permitted* the Canons Regular to print it under the name of Thomas à Kempis. This was intended to settle the dispute between the Benedictines and the Augustinians, but alas ! the Benedictines still clung to the claims of the supposed Gersen, though it may now be said that scarcely any one out of Italy besides these writers could believe that it came from that country. The resemblances to the writings of Dante and of Jacopo da Todi are easily accounted for, as all were inspired from the same source, namely, the Scriptures, while the language as well as the testimony of the MSS. point to a northern country as its birthplace. The strongest opponents of the claims of Gersen are they who favour those of the great Chancellor Charlier de Gerson, the grandest orator and politician of his day. One of the ablest of these, Mons. Gence, has written thirty-three works on the

subject ; in them he shows that all the MSS. bearing the name of Gersen refer to the Chancellor, and not to a mythical person, as in those days no one was particular in spelling, and the title of Abbé was applied indiscriminately to all ecclesiastics in France. It is also to be remarked that two or more of these MSS. have "Chanc. Paris" after the name, and one "Doctor of Paris," and all the Italian translations prior to 1500 bear the name of the Chancellor. Four writers of considerable ability have advocated his claims —Mons. Labbé in 1653, Dupin in 1698, Gence in 1809, and Darche in 1875. Monsieur Tamizey-Larroque and M. Vert have also written on the same side. It was thought at one time that to produce a *chef d'œuvre* like the *Imitation* required an author of acknowledged ability. As the Chancellor undoubtedly was the foremost man of his age, it was on this account attributed to him, especially as there is some probability of his having introduced the work into France, for having been the advocate of the Brothers of Common Life at the Council of Constance, the latter would most likely have let him see the work, as having been produced by one of their order.

Another reason for imputing the author-

ship of the *Imitation* to the French Chancellor was that it was constantly bound up with his *Meditatio Cordis*, and as it was anonymous it might naturally be supposed to be by the same author. This was, however, even in France, never the general opinion, and many knew that it was written by Thomas à Kempis. There was an edition of one of the oldest French translations issued at Toulouse in 1488, in which it was said to be written by St. Bernard, or another devout person.

That Gerson could have written the *Imitation* is simply impossible, as its author was certainly a monk, and wrote for monks, while Gerson was not one, and had no nearer connection with monasteries than that his brother was the head of one. Mons. Renan, in his *Etudes d'Histoire Religieuse*, puts the case plainly thus :—

"The opinion which attributes to Gerson the book of the *Imitation* is in all points insupportable. The book does not figure in the list of the Chancellor's writings drawn up by his own brother. A personage so celebrated in his lifetime could not, even if he wished, keep anonymous a book which became so quickly famous, and in a century when publicity was so extended. Besides, there is a

strange contrast between the rough schoolman whose life was filled with many combats, and the peaceful monk who wrote these pages so full of gentleness and artless resignation. A man who had mingled in all the strifes of his time could never have known how to form such fine and penetrating lines. Gerson, even in retirement, continued to be troubled with all the quarrels of the time."

When writers say that he might have written it in his retirement, they forget that he only retired in 1425, and then the *Imitation* had been in use for some years. Gerson was a great writer, but his style had nothing in common with the pregnant sentences of the *Imitation*. Mons. L. Moland, a French writer, says in 1856, "The talent of Gerson is as full of inequalities as his life is of contradictions. His *Meditatio Cordis* places him not only among the wisest and sweetest masters of the Inner Life, but also among the most remarkable writers of the literature of the fifteenth century." This may account for some supposing him to be the author of the *Imitation*, but as there are mystics and mystics, the spirit and style of that work have nothing in common with the *Meditatio*. Gerson was essentially a man of his time, and did not rise above its spirit;

he may have felt the vanity of the world, but he did not wish to leave it, and was never a recluse, even when he retired to Lyons. He was a man determined to rule. Can we imagine him as saying, "Be not ashamed of serving others for the love of Christ"?* or, "It is a great matter to live in obedience, to be under a superior, and not to be at our own disposal. It is much safer to obey than to govern"?† How different is the spirit shown by Gerson at the Council of Constance, demanding the death of John Huss, and proclaiming the necessity of stamping out heresy, from that shown in the saying, "If one that is once or twice warned will not give way, contend not with him; but commit all to God . . . who well knoweth how to turn evil into good";‡ or, "Be patient in bearing with the defects and infirmities of others!" Gerson agrees with the author in the opinion that Scripture and experience are the true foundations of a spiritual life, but differs from him in requiring philosophy to precede theology, and not to be joined together, though agreeing in the opinion

* *Imitation*, I. 7.

† *Ibid.*, I. 9.

‡ *Ibid.*, I. 16.

that whatever serves to establish a sound faith, to strengthen hope and influence love, are the true property of theology. It is interesting to compare the life of Gerson with that of A Kempis, as they were contemporaries, or nearly so, for Gerson was born in 1363 and Thomas in 1379. The former became Bachelor of Divinity in 1387, and Chancellor of the Church of Paris in 1392. In 1395 he was Dean of St. Donat, when Thomas arrived at Deventer; in 1405 he became curé, and in 1408 was a deputy to the Council of Pisa, where he helped in the election of Alexander as Pope. In 1415, two years after Thomas had taken orders, Gerson attended the Council of Constance; this was one year before his connection with the Brothers of Common Life, whose cause he then championed. In 1425 he retired to Lyons, when Thomas was selected sub-prior, and died in 1429, when Thomas became treasurer. Gerson's works are highly valued, and a complete edition of them was published in 1706, in five folio volumes. It is almost needless to add that the *Imitation* is not to be found among them.

Peter Scot, a canon of Strassburg, in the 1488 edition of Gerson's works, and Martin Simus, in his preface to the 1494

edition, both say that many works were wrongly attributed to him, mentioning the *De Contemptu Mundi* as one of them, at the same time stating that the author was Thomas, a Canon Regular. Besides being omitted in Scot's edition, this work was omitted in the list of Gerson's works drawn up by his brother.

Though it is thus shown conclusively that Gerson could not have been the author, can we not surmise some reason besides his greatness for his name being connected with the work? We believe that he was the means of introducing the work into France, and that to him, as Mons. Moland says, may be credited that translation known under the name of *L'Internelle Consolation*, so free and so independent that it has often been considered an original work. The passages in the *Imitation* which make it impossible for him to have been the author are often modified in this translation, as in the tenth chapter of the third book, "It is not granted to every one to forsake all things, to renounce the world, and to undertake a monastic life," becomes, "You have not given this grace to every one that they should renounce altogether this world, and that they should take up a monastic life or religion." Sir

James Stephens considers this translation superior to the original from its boldness, its feeling, and its *human* character.

The claims of Gerson may be said to be given up even in France, though the prepossessions of the writers of that country prevent them from universally giving the palm to Thomas, thinking his other works show a weakness that would be impossible in the writer of the *Imitation*, a weakness much exaggerated, as shown in a previous chapter. For certainly the more one studies these works the more highly one thinks of them.

Mons. Arthur Loth, who is at present the chief French writer on this subject, acknowledges the strong arguments in favour of Thomas being the author of the *Imitation*: "The opinion of the historians of his order who were his contemporaries; a common fame which was very extended in the fifteenth century, numerous MSS. and editions next to the first time of printing;" and yet he adds, "they lose their force before the authentic date of a manuscript." Such a MS. he thinks he has found, but how can he prove that the date is authentic? He gives the date as previous to 1406, because there is in the volume a calendar beginning with that year. If this is the

correct date, it destroys at once the claims of both Gerson and A Kempis, as neither of these could have written it at that date, and Mons. Loth would even date it still earlier — perhaps half a century earlier, as it is the copy of a copy.

Before such a statement could be accepted, a careful examination of the volume was made, when it was found that such a date was impossible. Canon Santini says that the volume is a collection of pieces by various writers, that one-third of the paper is different from the rest, and that it includes a work of the Chancellor Gerson, his *De Arte Moriendi*. A closer examination shows that the MS. was of German origin, as it contains many Ochs and Prochs, such gutturals not being found in French MSS.; further, that it came from a house of the Brothers of Common Life, since it contained rules of the constitution of that body which were not adopted until after 1406, the supposed date. This MS. has been again carefully examined by Father Becker, who has given an account of it in the *Précis Historiques* for April 1889, published in Brussels. In that journal he states that it is "a simple collection of different heterogeneous tracts copied by different hands, and put together at an unknown time. There are

at least three different kinds of paper, and the sheets have been bound *after* having been written. Towards the end, in a hand different from the preceding treatise, is a large one, the paper of which is seen *at once* to be different, as it is much whiter than the others. The margins of the others are uncut, but this has been cut on three sides, evidently because it was larger. It was cut *after* having been written on, as at page 231, the title of the chapter, '*De Commendatione Claustralium Silentii*', placed, according to a common custom, on the lower margin as a guide to the illuminator, has been partly cut away by the knife." He also points out that the *Imitation*, which begins on the back of leaf 29, is on a different paper from the prayers and calendar which commence the volume, and that the front of page 29 is evidently the last page of some book of prayers previously placed in front of it, since it is in the same kind of writing. When the volume was bound this had been removed. To show that the volume is a thorough *pot pourri*, he points out that it contains a German treatise on the pulse. "Some pages and parts of pages, having been left blank by the original copyist, have been filled in by a later hand with prayers and

extracts from spiritual books," among which are excerpts from the third and fourth book of the *Imitation*. With regard even to the date on the calendar, the fact of its beginning with the year 1406 only proves that it was *after* that date, as Father Becker shows from examples of the calendars in several breviaries. If we look to the calendar of our own Book of Common Prayer we shall see that it commences some years before the date of the book. Another French writer, Mons. Madden, is convinced of the Teutonic origin of the *Imitation*, but rather than give the honour to Thomas à Kempis, he would prefer to give it to his brother John, or to Vos of Heusden.

We have mentioned the strong reasons for the work being attributed to St. Bernard, on account of the many quotations from his works. Several MSS., as previously mentioned, have the name of Bonaventura attached to them, and some Kalkar and other Carthusians. Kalkar was the friend of Gerard Groot, and we see from his life how close was the connection of this leader with the Carthusians, who are mentioned in the *Imitation*, and among whom the work has been a great favourite, for many MSS. were early spread about among their various monas-

teries. Walter Hilton was an English Carthusian, credited with the authorship of the book under the name of *Musica Ecclesiastica*. It is very probable that he was one of the first to introduce it to this country, though there is no evidence to show that he wrote such a work. John Kempis, who is mentioned in some MSS., is known to have made a collection of the writings of St. Bernard, and may have furnished his brother with materials. John Gerson, the brother of the Chancellor who became Prior of the Celestines at Lyons, is also put forward as the author, and perhaps some reasons might be found for his claims, as well as for those of others.

Pope Innocent III. is spoken of as the author, because he wrote a work *De Contemptu Mundi*, but the cruel persecutor of the Albigenses could hardly have written such a work as the *Imitation*. The body of evidence in favour of Thomas à Kempis, both internal and external, seems to us overwhelming, and we believe that no one who fully and impartially studies the subject, as brought out in the pages of Mr. Kettlewell or of Dr. Cruise, can fail to be convinced that Thomas was really the author of the four treatises now known under the name of the *Imitation*, with which treatises the

volume commences, as well as of the other nine which are comprised in this MS. written by his own hand. For what more can be desired than a MS. of the author's, a contemporary MS. copied from it, and many contemporary witnesses. Of one of the strongest proofs of his authorship, to be found in his own written copy, we shall treat in the next chapter.

That the work is not said to be compiled by him is natural, for the motto of the author was *ama nesciri*; but that he was the mere scribe, as asserted by some, is incredible, for, as Monsignor Malou says : "It is impossible that an author, as humble and as pious as Thomas à Kempis, would have transcribed at the head of his works four very important treatises, which were not his. There are many copies of the works of this author transcribed by his own hand ; but there is not one of them in which his treatises are mixed up in the same volume with the works of other authors. In transcribing the four books of the *Imitation* at the head of his works, Thomas à Kempis avows himself to be their author."*

Some of the contemporary witnesses

* Malou, *Recherches, etc.*, 1858, p. 365.

in favour of Thomas may be registered as follows :—

1. John Busch, who, in his *Chronicle of Windesheim*, mentions the arrival of two Brethren from Zwolle. “One of them, Thomas of Kempen, has written many devout works, namely, *Qui sequitur me de imitatione Christi.*” It is asserted by some opponents that this must have been added later, as it is absent in some MSS. Such a remark might be justified if it was only in one MS., but it is in several ; besides, it is quite in accordance with Busch’s custom to introduce such remarks of people when speaking of places ; thus, when writing of the convent of Groenendaal, he says that Ruysbroek “composed many most devout books of the most lofty contemplation in the mother tongue ;” and in another place he mentions that the sub-prior “preached a solemn sermon.”

2. Hermann Ryd, one of the Brothers of Windesheim, writing of the Canons Regular, says : “The brother who has composed the book of the *Imitation* is called Thomas ; he is sub-prior of the monastery of St. Agnes, near Zwolle ;” and he further states that he has spoken to him.

3. Wessel is said by his biographer Hardenberg to have been so moved by

the *Imitation* that he determined to go and live at Zwolle, in order to be near Mount St. Agnes, so that he could enjoy the friendship of the pious Thomas à Kempis. Hardenberg, who visited the monastery, says that "the monks have shown me many writings of the very pious Thomas à Kempis, of which they have preserved, besides many other books, the truly inestimable work of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ.*"

4. The German anonymous biographer of Thomas gathered his materials for his biography from the monks of Mount St. Agnes, who were the companions of Thomas; and at the end gives the catalogue of his works, among which stand the books of the *Imitation* as treatises 5, 6, 7, and 8.

5. The editor of the Nüremberg edition gives also a catalogue, not exactly agreeing with the preceding, but containing the four treatises.

6. John Mauburne, who had served his novitiate at Mount St. Agnes, soon after the death of Thomas wrote a work, *Rosetum Spiritualium Exercitiorum*, and quotes several sentences from the *Imitation* as if written by A Kempis. In another work, *Venatorium*, he writes, "Brother Thomas à Kempis, among other works

which he made, composed the little book *Qui sequitur me*, which some attribute falsely to Dominus Gersen."

7. Francis Tolensis, the last sub-prior of Mount St. Agnes, speaks of Thomas as the author of the *Imitation*.

The witness of Adrien de But is a very important one. He was a Cistercian who wrote a chronicle of the monastery of Dunes, and after the date of 1458 he has inserted this remark : "In this year Brother Thomas de Kempis, professor of the Order of Canons Regular, edifies many by his published writings ; he wrote the *Life of S. Lydwig*, and a certain volume besides in metre, *Qui sequitur me*." This note has been signed by Adrien de But himself. Dr. Cruise has had a photograph of the page containing the note taken, by which we can see, as he points out, that the note applies to the year 1458, to which it is affixed, and not to the year 1480, as had been previously supposed, for the account of that year is added afterwards, and at that time Thomas à Kempis was dead; and the word *edifies* is in the present tense, while the word *wrote*, as applied to the *Imitation*, is in the past, as if the work were already in existence. Father Becker, who agrees in Dr. Cruise's supposition, says that Thomas was busy at that time

with his sermons to the novices of whom he had the charge.

The testimony of Trithemius is supposed to be of doubtful value; it, however, should not be passed over. He was Abbot of Spannheim, and in 1493 wrote a list of the great men of Germany, and among them he placed Thomas à Kempis as the author of the *Imitatio*. Though Thomas had died but a few years before (1471), there were rumours which Trithemius thought it his duty to note; this he did by saying that there were two Kempis brothers, and that some of the works of the one might be attributed to the other; adding, that "our seniors say that their seniors read the work." He himself evidently attached little importance to such a statement, for he writes immediately after this that many, however, assert the contrary.

Among the MSS. possessed by the late Mr. Ed. Waterton was one dated 1501 of the *Scala Devotionis*, by Severinus de Bolsward, a Franciscan, in which the books of *Imitation* are attributed to Thomas.

There are in the *Imitation* many little points which involuntarily indicate the authorship. For instance, in Book III., chap. xlvi., is a passage, "We are frail men, even if we are reputed and called angels,"

which is supposed to refer to a time when the people of the neighbourhood, seeing the processions of the white-robed monks at night, had thought to have seen visions of angels.

Father Becker points to a misquotation in the *Imitation*, which certainly proves that the author was a member of the Windesheim circle. In the ninth chapter of the second book we read: "St. Laurence overcame the world with his priest," which is exactly the contrary to the statement of Maximus of Turin, who says *non vincebat*, which shows that the author quoted not directly, but from some other work, and this we find was the *Windesheim Breviarium*, which has the same mistake, using *vicit* instead of *non vincebat*. Father Becker traces the source of this error.

In the third chapter of the first book, "What availeth it to dispute and contend about dark and hidden things?" and again, "What have we to do with genera and species?" —this is supposed by Father Becker to refer to the disputes between the nominalists and realists, which at that time were again disturbing the Brethren.

In Book I., chap. 24, there is a description of the punishment of the wicked in the next world: "The slothful shall be pricked forward with goads, the gluttons

tormented with great hunger and thirst." This has been thought by some to have suggested the idea to Dante, but we need not look so far. The *Imitation* could not have been written in Dante's time, and it was not necessary for its author to have read Dante, as it is shown by Jonckbloet in his *Literary History* that there was a legend common to the fifteenth century in which is to be found such a description of punishment; and Father Becker has seen a copy of a MS. with this legend, accompanied by three books of the *Imitation*, as also a copy which had belonged to the Canons Regular of Windesheim.

The arguments in favour of Thomas we consider unanswerable; however, as we said before, some French authors think the author of the *Imitation* could not be the same person as the author of the other works of Thomas. In this they were in agreement with Mr. Busken-Huet, the only Dutchman, as Father Becker says, who opposed the claims of Thomas. However, since the time the father wrote, Busken-Huet has been convinced that the writings are all by the same man. He has devoted a section of his work, *Het Land van Rembrandt*,* to a study of

* A translation in German was published by Marie Mohr, in Leipzig, in 1886-7, 2 vols.

Thomas à Kempis, with relation to his times. This section bears his name as a representative of the fifteenth century. He states the difficulties of the case thus : (1) " His piety, like that of most mystics, was founded on Mariolatry, and yet the Virgin Mary is not mentioned in the *Imitation*. If this is strange, the same objection occurs with regard to his other works, as she is not mentioned in some of them, and very little in others ; in fact, among all of them there are certainly not more than three or four chapters on the subject." (2) That it is " more wonderful that we find no trace of want of taste, and of his blind superstition," but where is the want of taste in his other works, except in a few sermons, and some hastily written treatises ? (3) That it is " most wonderful still that a man without knowledge or experience, a man buried alive, whose circle of vision hardly reached beyond his provincial town,—that such a man should have written a work which testifies to a universal and deep knowledge of human nature, and whose literary beauties eclipse the fame of Church fathers of genius," and yet he is bound to add there is in reality no greater opposition between the *Imitation* and the other writings of Thomas than there is between

his religious feeling and his spiritual narrowness of judgment of worldly affairs. We certainly think this writer has overstated the case, probably led away by the love of antithesis ; for it is possible for a deep thinker to know what are the views that affect mankind, and a man that thinks of the world in general as vanity and full of wickedness is not likely to dwell especially on one state of wickedness more than another.

We have already mentioned the peculiar expressions that point to its Teutonic origin in chapter ii., but there are other peculiarities that seem to point strongly to Thomas à Kempis as the author. The habit of putting texts of Scripture as headings to several of the chapters of the *Imitation* is followed, according to Monsignor Malou, in fifteen of his other works ; his use of exclamations, "O quam," etc., are common to all. Certain uncommon uses of several Latin words also occur. *Alta* is used for "lofty" in a spiritual sense in the *Imitation*, and forty times in his other works. *Leviter* for "easily" occurs eighteen times ; *graviter* for "difficult" twenty-nine times ; *exteriora* and *interiora* one hundred and twenty-one times. The chapters of the *Imitation* often fall into two divisions, and this arrange-

ment is found in many of the author's other works. Mr. Duffield, in his *Latin Hymn Writers*, is the latest advocate of the claims of Thomas, and he so clearly sums up the case that we close this chapter in his words :—

"Thomas à Kempis's works as a whole fit into the writings of the group of disciples of Gerard Groot just as the *Imitation of Christ* fits into the rest of his works. He simply is the best writer they had, as the *Imitation* is the best thing he ever wrote. . . . No other century than his could have produced it. It reflects the ideas of no other group than that of Gerard and Florentius. Among their disciples there is no one but the author of the *Soliloquy of the Soul* and of the *Valley of Lilies* to whom we could give it. It differs no more in point of worth from Thomas's other books than does the *Pilgrim's Progress* from Bunyan's other writings, *Grace Abounding* always excepted."



In apertis Capitulo.

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D e decima veritatis	iiij
D e prudencia et agendis	iii
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CHAPTER IX.

THE MANUSCRIPTS.

“Never be wholly idle,
But read, or write, or pray, or muse.”—
Imit. I. 19.

 HERE are many treasures among the MSS. in the Royal or Bur- gundian Library in Brussels, but none surpass in interest a small volume from the pen of Thomas à Kempis. This beautiful codex, for it is a model of penmanship (Nos. 5855—5861) is a small 12mo, partly of paper and partly of parchment, and is still in a good state of preservation, though it shows marks of having been much used. It commences, after the list of contents, which is also written by Thomas, with the four treatises now known as the *Imitation*, but in a different order from the usual one, as the fourth precedes the third. This

arrangement is also observed in the catalogue of his works drawn up and written at the end of his life by a contemporary biographer. After these come the remaining treatises, and then is the subscription, "Finitus et completus anno domini MCCCCXLI per manus fratris Thomae Kempensis in Monte S. Agnetis prope Zwolles." This subscription is shown to be appropriate when a study of the MS., as the Abbé Spitzen points out, enables us to see that the composition of the volume was the affair of years, and that the first part may have been written about 1420. This is brought to light by the paper and by the writing. There are five different sets of sheets, the first containing Books 1, 2, and 4 of the *Imitation*, the second the third book, the third various small treatises, the fourth the *De Elevatione Mentis*, and the fifth the *Brevis Admonitio* and *Orationes*. The writing in the first set of sheets is the smallest, the second is rather larger, the third still larger, while the fourth and fifth are like the second. There are also different watermarks on the paper; the first ninety-seven leaves have a P., showing paper of the time of Philip the Bold; other leaves have an anchor, others the head of an ox, and others a Gothic P., showing the time

of Philip the Good, who lived 1430 to 1465. The last six leaves have no mark. Thomas only finished his copy of the Bible in July 1439, having taken sixteen years to write it, and he could hardly have written this codex in two years. Father Becker also points out the important fact that while the writer considered the first and second book complete, and left no space in the summary of the chapter before these books, nor at their end where he has written "Expliciunt, etc., " he reserved space for adding to the third and fourth, having left room for additions in the summary of the chapters of these books, as well as five blank leaves after the fourth book and ten after the third. Two chapters of the original have been lost, and have been replaced by a later scribe. Father Rosweyde expressed his willingness to send a portion of the MS. to Rome. Father Becker thinks these sheets may have been sent there and lost, at least never returned. The subscription has been said by the opponents of Thomas to mean that he was the mere scribe ; as Mabillon says, "Everybody has been deceived by it, and thought Thomas announced himself the author." The fact of Thomas being the scribe does not militate against his being the author as

well, for we find in the Burgundian Library another manuscript with a similar subscription, and in it all are undisputed works of his. We have already shown the importance given to this MS. by Hirsche's *Discoveries* (p. 102); we may also add that he has found many erasures and corrections in the MS. that are not the work of the scribe, but of an author who wishes to improve his work, as can be seen by comparing the MSS. before 1441 with it and the later ones.

This MS. was originally kept in the convent at Mount St. Agnes, but at its destruction, A.D. 1577, it came into the possession of Joannes Bellerus, who presented it in 1590 to the Jesuit monastery at Antwerp, where it remained, with the exception of two journeys to Paris, when its authenticity was examined into, until 1775, at the dissolution of the house. In that year the monastery was turned into a military school, and the MS. was then taken to Brussels, where it has remained ever since.

The MSS. which are chiefly quoted by the Gersenists in favour of their champion are :—

1st. The Arona MS., a small 12mo volume, containing all the four books. It consists of one hundred and seventy-one leaves of the finest parch-

ment, and is in perfect preservation. The writing is of a beautiful Latin character, with a few simple abbreviations; besides the *Imitation* it contains treatises of St. Bernard, St. Augustine, and St. Ambrose. In the beginning of the work there is a paper leaf (the only one), on which is written (evidently at a later period) that Bellarmine had said that "the *Imitation* was written neither by Gerson nor by A Kempis, but by Giovanni Gersen." There is added in a later hand that the MS. was brought from Geneva to Arona, and that Bellarmine had been convinced by the arguments of Rosweyde, and had finally confessed that "Thomas à Kempis was the author." This MS. is now in the National Library at Turin, and is proved to have been written by an ignorant scribe, as there are eight hundred mistakes in it.

2nd. The *De Advocatis* MS., supposed to have belonged to the Avogrado family, is without date or name. Chevalier Gregory, who found the volume, claims it for the thirteenth century, a claim he tries to support by a diarium of the Avogrado family, which is without doubt a forgery. There being no date, it is the duty of the palaeographers to decide on one, and the best palaeographers consider its probable date to be the middle or end of the fifteenth century. The celebrated Greek scholar Dübner speaks strongly against this MS. Leopold Delisle, one of the best French paleographers, as well as Mons. Arthur Loth, assign it to the fifteenth century. The most important evidence against its antiquity is the fact that the *De Meditatione Cordis* is included in the MS., and as this work was only written in 1400 a copy could not have been made before that date. There are various notes with dates, but the dates are 1527, 1550, and 1568 showing when the MS. was really in use.

3rd. The La Cava MS., which is also without name or date. It contains a drawing of a monk in the initial Q, which is said to be a portrait of Gersen! The fourth book is wanting.

4th. The Grammont MS. in the National Library in Paris, No. 13,596, 4to, in parchment. Two-thirds of the codex are taken up with the four books of the *Imitation*, after which come the *Libelli de Disciplina Claustralium*, with other works of Thomas,—which, of course, does away with the pretended antiquity, and forms an argument in favour of the authorship of A. Kempis.

5th. The Codex Paulanus was originally in the Benedictine monastery at Wiblingen, but is now in St. Paul's Benedictine monastery in Carinthia. It is fully described by Wolfsgruber, who confesses that the writing is of the fifteenth century, although it bears the date of 1384-5, but claims it as a copy of an older MS., the dates of which the scribe has copied. Such a claim seems absurd, and Dr. Cruise has carefully examined the evidence relating to this MS. (*Thomas à Kempis*, p. 161 and following), and finds it worthless. He there hints that the dates do not form part of the original MS. Since writing his analysis of this MS. in 1887 Dr. Cruise has examined the MS. itself, and is confirmed in his opinion, both from the position of the dates and the form of the letters, that the dates are not genuine, and formed no part of the original MS., "but a subsequent addition," and that the ink is also different. He has had six pages of this codex photographed, and has published these photogravures, with a note on them, in the *Précis Historiques*, May 1890. A glance at these photogravures is sufficient to show the worthlessness of its pretensions.

As several MSS. are mentioned in the

controversy we give lists of the principal ones according to Santini, first those which are dated arranged in chronological order, next the undated ones in order of places.*

Dom Wolfsgruber also gives a list of MSS., which differs considerably from this. According to him Munich possesses 58 MSS., Vienna 26, Paris 16, Brussels 14, Metz 3, St. Petersburg 2, Olmutz 2, Donauschlag 2. The libraries at Arras, Cracow, Erlangen, Innsbruck, Liège, Lille, Marburg, Troyes, and Verdun have each one.

There are 12 MSS. in the monastery of St. Gallen, and the Benedictines possess several, 8 at St. Peter's, Salzburg, 7 at Kremsmunster, 4 at Mölk, 3 at Göttweig, 1 at Schotten, 1 at St. Paul in Carinthia, and 1 at Seitenstetten, while the Cistercians seem to have but two.

PRINCIPAL DATED MSS.

1421. At the abbey of Moelck or Melck, containing the first book. The date is doubtful, as it is in a later hand. †

* The descriptions are taken from the list drawn up by Canon Santini in his "*I diritti di Tommase da Kempis*," ii., pp. 229 and following.

† A catalogue of the MSS. in the Benedictine monastery of Melk (Monast. Mellicensis) has just

1424. The Kirchheim, called also Ghesquière, from the Jesuit Doctor to whom it belonged, is now in the Burgundian Library at Brussels (No. 15,137), and contains the first three books. At the beginning is written "Incipit libellus de Imitatione Christi et contemptu mundi," and at the end of the first page there is a note, "Notandum quod iste tractatus editus est a probo et egregio viro magistro Thoma de Kempis dictus, descriptus ex manu auctoris in Trajecto anno 1424 in sociatu provincialatus." Unfortunately this note is in a different handwriting from the MS., and therefore cannot be relied on for the date.
1424. Wolfenbuttel.
1425. The Gaesdonck, from the monastery of Canons Regular at that town, bears the name of Thomas and has the whole four books.
1426. The Ervic, from the monastery of Canons Regular there.
1427. The Codex Noviomagensis, from the monastery of Canons Regular of St. Catharine at Nimeguen, the capital of Gueldres. It was from this MS. that Gence took his text in 1826.
1427. Calmet mentions a MS. from Ochsenhausen, but it has since been lost.
1427. Codex Trudonensis, from the abbey of St. Troud, near Liege, only contains the first three books. Mon. Leroy described this MS. in his *Etudes* when he saw it at Ghent in 1836.

been published; under No. 165 is described a volume containing thirty-six treatises, among which is Thomas à Kempis, *de Reformatione hominis et primo de imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi (liber primus)*.

1428. Calmet mentions the MS. of Augia Dives as of this date in his *Diarium Helveticum*, p. III. It is of German origin.
1429. The Codex Asnaburgensis, now in the Bur-gundian Library, Nos. 1018—21, contains only book one.
1430. According to Mons. Denis, the Codex Coloniensis of Santa Croce contains various works, partly on parchment, partly on paper. In it the *Exhortation to the Communion* is attributed to St. Bernard. This MS. is now in the Palatine Library at Vienna.
1430. Codex Wiblingensis III., in paper, came from a Benedictine monastery in Swabia.
- 1433 and 1434. Two from Weingarten, both on paper, one written by Brother Conrad Obersperg, the second by John of Mersberg, was found in the Benedictine Abbey of St. Maria (in Swabia).
1435. Codex Sangallensis.
1436. The Paduan MS., has the name of Gerson, but Santini says that according to Mabillon this MS. has been altered.
1437. The Augsburg MS., No. 1, has the word *exterius* replaced by *memoriter*.
1437. Codex Augustanus or Ulricanus I., of paper, belonged to the monastery of St. Udalrich near Vienna. The first book was written at Wiblingen, the second in 1451.
1438. Codex Aquisbacensis III., from the Car-thusian monastery, where there are four MSS., but this one, which contains Book I., is the only one dated; the second and fourth are said to have been written by a certain Carthusian at Reineck.
1438. Codex Lunaclacensis, from the monastery of Mondesee (of paper).

- 1439. Codex Gemnicensis VI., contains Books I. and II., edited by a certain Carthusian in Reineck.
- 1439. The Rothensian MS., belonged to the Benedictines apud Rhenum.
- 1440. The Augsburg MS. II., from the monastery of the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, is in 4to, and contains the first book.
- 1441. The famous Antwerp Codex, written by Thomas, already described, pp. 141-4.
- 1441. The Indersdorf MS., No. II., is said to be compiled by "a certain Canon Regular."
- 1441. Pollingano, No. I., "a Johanne Gers." As this inscription breaks off suddenly we cannot tell what the scribe intended, and therefore it is not necessarily in favour of Gerson or Gersen.
- 1443. Codex Zwiefaltensis, written by Brother Conrad Eberberg.
- 1447. The Codex Coloniensis of St. Barbara, which belonged to the monastery of the Carthusians of St. Barbara, in Cologne, has the first three books. While the first book is said to be by a certain Carthusian, it is in the index "by a certain devout Regular," to which is added in the margin "whose name is Thomas Kempis," etc.
- 1447. The Pollingano, No. III., contains various tracts, among which are the second, third, and fourth books.
- 1448. Brullenensis S. Emerani, at Ratisbon.
- 1448. The Codex Rebendorfensis I., from the monastery of St. John the Baptist, at Rebendorf in Franconia, which belonged to the Canons Regular of Windesheim, contains also a life of Thomas à Kempis.
- 1448. Codex Spizelianus, which contains the first three books, is in the library of the

- convent of Wengen, written by Jaspar Pforcheim.
1450. The Abbeville MS., of paper, which belonged to the Minor Brethren of that town, is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 3,788.
1450. Codex Augustanus, or Ulricanus II., has the first three books.
1452. Codex Gemnicensis I., is in 4to, and belonged to the Carthusians of Gemmingen. It contains the first book written by John Lang, of Prima.
1457. A Brussels MS., No. 2,581, in royal 8vo, on parchment, contains the four books in the following order, 3, 2, 1, and 4.
1457. The second Gemmingen MS., contains the fourth book alone.
1458. The third Paris Codex contains, besides the *Imitation*, works of Bonaventura, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard.
1458. Codex Parcensis I., was found in the monastery of the Carthusians of Notre Dame du Parc, near Mans. It contains *de Misericordia* by Innocent III. as well as the *Imitation*.
1460. A second MS. from the same monastery, said to be written by "a monk of the Carthusian order."
1460. The St. Germain MS., from the Benedictine Abbey of St. Germain des Près, but now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (No. 13,597), Paris, is in 16mo, of the finest paper in an elegant writing. It attributes the authorship to John Gerson.
1463. Codex Bruxellensis, belonged to the Carthusians. Said to be composed "by a certain Regular."
1463. The Salzburg MS., No. 1, which belonged to the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter,

- is of paper. Like the Pollignano MS. of 1441, it has Joh. Gers. incomplete.
1464. Venetian MS., No. 1.
1464. The Florentine MS., No. 1, was found in the monastery of the Benedictines of Florence, and attributes the authorship to John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris.
1465. The second Venetian MS., also attributes it to John Gerson.
1466. The second Florentine, another Benedictine, does the same.
1467. In the Codex Schyrensis *corde tenus* is used instead of *exterius*.
1470. The third Gemmingen MS., which is in 8vo, and contains the four books, attributes them to Dr. Bonaventura.
1471. The Brussels MS., No. 2,982-9, of the Burgundian Library, contains with the *Imitation* the *Soliloquy* and other writings of St. Augustine.
1471. In the Codex Buxheimensis from the Cistercian monastery library of Memmingen, Thomas is said to be the compiler. It was in the possession of the late Mr. Waterton.
1471. The Codex Dalhemensis, came from the house of St. Peter and St. Anthony, belonging to the Canons Regular of Windesheim. In it is written "Brother Thomas Kempis, etc., made it."
1472. The Codex Afflighemensis, which had belonged to the Benedictines, but is now in the Mazarin Library in Paris, also attributes the authorship to "Brother Thomas à Kempis."
1474. In the Codex Griesensis, which came from the Tyrol, is written at the end "the compiler was a certain Canon Regular of the name of Thomas."

1475. In the index to the Codex Augustanæ Reipublicæ the work is said to be by "Thomas, Canon Regular of Mount St. Agnes."
1477. The Codex from the convent of Maiseck is written by D. Cornelius Offerman, rector of the convent, and is said to be composed by Father Thomas à Kempis.
1481. The MS. in the library of Prince Chigi in Rome gives the credit to John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris.
1482. The second Louvain MS., which came from Leydensdorf, belonging to the Canons Regular of Windesheim, attributes it to Thomas à Kempis.
1487. The Palatine MS., No. 1 of the Cesarian Library at Vienna, does the same.
1487. The Viennese MS., in the Palatine Library, contains "Gerson's *Meditation*" and the "*Imitatio* of Thomas Kempis."
1502. The Codex Rotomagensis, in the Rouen Library, A36, bears the name of Gerson, though it must have been copied from a Flemish or German MS., as the German form "Proch" is used.
1529. A Brussels MS., Nos. 11,160-68 of the Burgundian Library, contains the *Imitation* and other works of À Kempis, whose name it bears.

PRINCIPAL UNDATED MSS.

1. The *De Advocatis* MS., described p. 145.
2. The Alliaciano Codex, so-called from its second possessor, or Bisciano from its first, is in 12mo, partly of paper and partly of vellum. As the date is marked MCCC, it is claimed as if it represented the year 1300 by the opponents of the

claims of Thomas ; but as this codex contains a Bull written by the same hand as the *Imitation*, and dated 1448, it is evident that the date is incomplete. It has on its frontispiece Jo. de Canabaco, which is supposed by Mons. Ruelens to be a Latinized form of À Kempis, as no such person as John of Canabaco is known, unless it is a mistake for Tambaco.

3. The Codex Althensis, No. 2, contains, besides the *Imitation*, extracts from the other writings of À Kempis.

4. Arona, described p. 145.

5. Augsburg III. is apparently written by the same scribe as the second Augsburg Codex, written in 1440 (see p. 150), which contains only Book I. This MS. is in folio, and contains the four books, and in it is a note saying that the compiler is a certain Brother Thomas, etc.

6. The Codex Bellovacensis belonged, according to Mabillon, to a Canon of Beauvais and to the Abbey of St. Hilaire. It contained, at the beginning of the second book, a portrait of a monk in a white dress, but no argument can be drawn from a figure in an illuminated letter.

7. The Codex Bobbiensis, or of the Celestines, now in the University Library, Turin, contains Books I. to III. on eighty-eight double folios on fine parchment.

8. Brussels MS. in parchment in small 8vo (No. 4,913).

9. Cambray, attributed to John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris, is supposed to be written about 1441.

10 and 11. The Carthusian MSS., Nos. 1 and 2, belonged to the monastery of St. Michele of Venice, are both of the fifteenth century, and attributed to a Carthusian monk. In the second MS, it is added that many learned men attributed it to Walter, an English monk, who wrote a work in

1430 called *Musica Ecclesiastica*. This is the only foreign MS. which attributes it to Walter Hilton.

12. La Cava, described on p. 146.

13. In the Clermont, of German origin, but now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, it is said to be made by a holy brother of the Carthusian order.

14. In the Catalogue of the Library of the Diessen monastery is mentioned Thomas Kempensis de Imitatione, etc., in folio, and another in 4to.

15. The Codex Ettalensis, from a Bavarian monastery, is mentioned by Amort as attributing the work to Thomas.

16. At St. George of Augsburg, in one of the Colleges of the Canons Regular, is a manuscript of Books 1-3 in 8vo, written in an ancient character, but without title or date.

17. In the Library of St. Genevieve at Paris, No. 413, is a MS. with the inscription "The Work of St. Bernard," which is attributed to John Gerson, Paris, Chancellor.

18. The Grammont MS., No. 1,359, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, is described on p. 146.

19. The Grenoble MS., also at Paris, which contains, with the first three books of the *Imitation*, the Meditations of St. Anselm and the Epistle of St. Catharine of Sienna, is supposed to be written about 1444.

20. The Guelforbitan MS., in the Wolfenbuttel Library, is in 8vo, and said to be compiled by John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris.

21. Do., No. 2, which is without date, name, or index, contains the whole work, but is divided in six books, the *Soliloquy of the Soul*, by Thomas, being inserted between the fourth and fifth.

22 and 23. Two MSS. at Lambeth Palace, called *Musica Ecclesiastica*.

24. The Lebeuf MS., called so from its old possessor, is in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris. It is in Gothic character, but has not the fourth book.

25. Mons. Loth's MS. This MS. was found by Mons. Arthur Loth, who is against the claims of Thomas, in the Compartement des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale. It is bound in red morocco, and is of recent date and German origin. Mons. Loth, however, considers it of great antiquity, and having found in it an almanack beginning with the year 1404, wishes to assert that this must be the date of the MS., and therefore before the time of Thomas. Further description of this manuscript and answer to Mons. Loth's assertions will be found on pp. 126-9.

26. The Louvain MS., No. 1, contains the first three books, the second and third being transposed. There is a note added in 1586 stating that it was written by Thomas, but as the writing is different, it only meant compiled by.

27. Margaret of York's MS., is in the Royal Library at Brussels, No. 9,272, and is said by Mon. Ruelens to have been made expressly for Margaret of York, wife of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. It is a large folio volume of the finest parchment, containing a French translation of the second book, with miniatures and various writings of St. Bernard and of other Church fathers.

28. The Palatine, No. 2, at the Cesarian Library at Vienna, contains seventeen Ascetic works, with only the first book of the *Imitation*.

29. The Parma, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 1,558.

30. Pollingano II., supposed to be written about 1442, with an inscription assigning the authorship to a certain Canon Regular.

31. The Raitenhaslach MS., from the abbey of

that name in Bavaria, contains the *Imitation*, said to be by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Amort speaks of two MSS. in the monastery, one of which attributed the work to Thomas.

32. The MS. of Reittenbuech in Bavaria, contains the four books of the famous man, Thomas of Mont St. Agnes, near Utrecht, a Canon Regular.

33. In the Benedictine monastery of St. Paul's in Carinthia is a MS. which came from Wiblingen, called now the *Codex Paulanus*. This MS. is said to have been written in 1384, but such a statement is evidently a mistake or the date is a forgery, as the writing is apparently of the fifteenth century (described on p. 146). There is another MS. which is not mentioned in Santini's list, No. 15, 138 in the Royal Library at Brussels, which states: "Hic est libellus qui vocatur *Musica Ecclesiastica*." It is in small 8vo. Liber Carthusiae Monachorum Brugis. In this MS. the third book is called *Liber interna consolacionis*.

Canon Santini only mentions three MSS. in this country, two at Lambeth and one at Oxford. Mons. Loth seems also to be under the same impression; but though we have not many we have several, and Father Becker comes nearer to the truth when he reckons sixteen, which is a poor amount, however, compared to the number of those in Germany and Holland, which countries have the larger share of the four hundred MSS. supposed to exist. Bernard's Oxford catalogue of MSS., made in 1697, is remarkably correct, and all the MSS.

quoted by him can be traced except the one of Coventry. Of this the present head-master of King Henry's School, to which the library belonged, kindly answered my inquiries and stated that it has disappeared as well as other valuable books. The two MSS. at Lambeth Palace Library are both entitled *Musica Ecclesiastica*. No. 536 is a small 12mo, beautifully written, though with contractions; the initials are finely illuminated. In this volume are other tracts written in the same hand. No. 475 is a small 4to, in larger but much inferior writing; it contains the first three books and a small tract on the uses of tribulation. Before the words on the title *Musica Ecclesiastica* there has been added by another writer "Gualteri Hilton" and "sive de Imitatione Christi." The second treatise is in a different hand.

In the British Museum are six MSS. The MS. indexed in Bernard's catalogue as in the Jacobean Library, No. 534, is now in the King's Library (Royal MSS. 7B8). It is in folio and is most beautifully written in large, clear letters, with a fine illuminated frontispiece. It is undated, and neither scribe nor author is mentioned. It begins with "Incipit tabula primæ partis libri interne consolacionis qui vocatur musica ecclesiastica,"

and ends with "Explicit tertia et ultima pars," etc., for it has only the three books, "divisa in tres partes principales." There is another MS. in the Royal collection (8c VII.) which contains an imperfect copy of Book I. on parchment. There are two good MSS. in the Harleian collection in 8vo, on parchment. No. 3,216, dated 1464, is beautifully written, and has illuminations in gold and colours. It contains various other treatises, among which are excerpts from St. Jerome and a tract by Bonaventura. As the word *exterius* is missing it comes probably from France. No. 3,323, on parchment, not quite as well written as the preceding, is dated 1478, contains the whole four books alone, and attributes the work to Gerson the Chancellor. In the Burney collection No. 314 is a MS. on paper also attributed to Gerson; it is in 4to, and is undated. The ink is much faded. Among the Add. MSS., 11,437 is a volume in paper, containing, with sermons and *Æsop's Fables*, the first two books. It is in a cramped hand, with all the usual contractions.

At Oxford there are five MSS., the most important being that in Magdalen College, xciii., written by John Dygoun in 1438, called *Musica Ecclesiastica*, though there is added "potius Thomæ

à Kempis opus de imitatione Christi et continet tres partes." Two are in the Laudian Collection Misc. 167-215, one of paper, the other of parchment. These contain other works besides the *Imitation*. The other two entered in Bernard's Oxford Catalogue of MSS. are numbered Bodl. 632 and Arch. Selden, Supra 93 ; in the old Catalogue 1,957 and 3,481.

There are three MSS. of the *Imitation* at Cambridge, one of which is a translation. Of the other two, one is in St. John's College, the other at Emmanuel. The first is described in Cowie's Catalogue ; it is called "Musica Ecclesiastica sive de Imitatione Christi," and contains the first three books. It is beautifully written on vellum, in 4to, and illuminated.

The second is also called *Musica Ecclesiastica*, and contains but three books. There is the name of neither compiler nor scribe. It is followed by a collection of Anathemas, and there is bound up with it the Soliloquies of St. Augustine, written in a similar hand, and with decorative initials also resembling those in the *Imitation*.

The late Mr. Waterton had several MSS., one of which was that known as the Buxheim Codex of 1471.

Sir Thomas Phillipps is also said to have

had a MS. of this work; and according to *Notes and Queries* of October 12th, 1861, Mr. John Williams possesses three MSS. which came from Erfurt.

We have seen with what rapidity MSS. of the *Imitation* were produced, and how copies continued to be made until the end of the fifteenth century. We will now consider the evidence that is borne by the translations. If Thomas à Kempis was the author we shall naturally look to Holland for the first translation, and according to Mr. Busken-Huet we find fragments of a Dutch translation in the Upper Yssel dialect which appeared in 1423; another Dutch translation by John Sutken about that date is mentioned. If Amort is correct, the Codex Augustanus Germanicus appeared in 1450. This MS. belonged to the monastery of the Dominicans of St. Catharine at Augsburg, and contains the lives of Gerard Groot, of Florentius, and some other writings of Thomas translated into German. In the preface it is mentioned that Father Thomas à Kempis composed the devout little book, *De Imitatione*. Prior to this is the translation of the book into French, written in Amiens in 1447. The Valenciennes Codex, also in French, is dated 1462. It is beautifully written on parchment, in

folio, and it was this MS. which first suggested the idea that French was the original language of the *Imitation*.

The Codex Leodiensis I. is a Flemish translation, written in 1463. Originally at Louvain, it is now in Brussels, where it is catalogued as No. 11,856.

In the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, is a translation, in the French-Flemish dialect, on paper, in 4to, and dated 1468. It bears the signature of Katherine d'Enghien, and is called the Codex Vallonicus, having been in the possession of Canon van den Block, of Brussels, whose heirs disposed of it. There is another French translation in the Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 7,276, which came from Toulouse, the date of which is uncertain.

In the Catalogue of the Counts of Angoulême, written in 1467, a French translation is mentioned. There is also at Brussels, No. 10,321, a MS. in 4to entitled *La Consolation Internelle*, which is a free translation in French of the first three books, the date of which is unknown.

There are probably other German translations of which we have found no traces.

There are two English translations, one

at Cambridge and one at Dublin, which were probably written about the middle of the fifteenth century. The latter, Dr. Ingram conjectures, cannot be later than 1460. He is about to edit this MS. for the Early English Text Society, with a collation of the Cambridge one, for the translation seems to be alike in both, though with considerable variants, which will all be noticed in this edition. Dr. Ingram has already described this MS. in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* for January 1883 (2nd series, vol. ii., p. 145). Bernard, in his Oxford Catalogue of MSS., mentions it as in the College of Physicians, Dublin. Dr. Ingram says that it was in the possession of Dr. John Madden, President of the Irish College of Physicians. It is not easy to trace its history, but from the names in it Dr. Ingram shows that it belonged in 1662 to Henry Dodwell, who was at one time a Fellow of Trinity, and also to the Turney family. It was presented to Trinity College by Sterne, Bishop of Clogher. It would be of great interest if we could find out from what monastery each of these two MSS. proceeded, and to know which is the original translation and which the copy, with its variations, or whether both are taken from some other

codex. They are both called *Musica Ecclesiastica*, and contain the first three books.

The Cambridge MS. is on vellum, containing 171 leaves, there being twenty lines to the page. It is described in the Catalogue of MSS. in the University Library, Cambridge. The concluding passages resemble the Dublin Codex, except that the Cambridge MS. has three "Amens," while the Dublin has but one, and omits the "Deo gratias" which is in the latter.

This latter is "written in a bold, round, and legible hand, on parchment, with few contractions. The lines are ruled in red, the writing is continuous, but the headings of the chapters are marked in red and the initials coloured alternately blue and red. The system of punctuation is peculiar : the end of a sentence is marked by a 7, followed by a capital ; the full stop serves as a comma, the semicolon is represented by ;, and the note of interroga-
tion by ?."*

The orthography, Dr. Ingram says, differs from that in the Cambridge MS., and he thinks that the MS. bears traces of an alteration of the text which would

* I have to thank Dr. Cruise for this description.

look as if the Dublin one were the later. Scholars will look forward with great interest for his edition, where all these points will be discussed.





CHAPTER X.

PRINTED EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS.

“Send out Thy light of truth, and shine upon the world.”—*Imit.* III. 23.

“There is one voice in books, and yet they teach not all men equally.”—*Imit.* III. 43.



O give a complete list and description of all the editions of the *Imitation* would take more space than we can spare. Those who take a special interest in the bibliography may be referred to Backer, *Essai Bibliographique sur les livres de l'Imitation*; where the number of editions and translations are reckoned to be about three thousand, and even this list is incomplete.

Notwithstanding the great number of MSS., the *Imitation* was one of the earliest books to be printed, for the first edition (*Editio Princeps*) was printed by Günther Zainer at Augsburg, about 1471 or 1472,

when the authorship was attributed to Thomas while he was still living. The first French edition is said to have been printed at Paris in 1481, and the first Italian at Venice, 1483. In a Paris edition of 1489, Gerson's name is mentioned, while in the Lyons edition of the same year Thomas is named as the author. Two Paris editions (1493 and 1498), as well as two German ones (1489 and 1493),* have the name of Thomas. Eighty-six editions appeared before 1563, at which date Castalio made an attempt to render it in what he thought clearer Latin. In 1599, Sommalius brought out his edition of Thomas's complete works. Dom Cajetan published his edition in 1616, and Rosweyde his in 1617. This latter was printed at the Plantin Press at Antwerp, and is one of the best editions. The Abbé Gonnelieu's edition, which appeared in 1724, has been the one most used in France. That of Valart, who was a Ger senist, was published in 1758, but it is not considered a good one; while that of Gence, which appeared in 1826, is very highly prized for the purity of its text, and for the references which the editor made

* These were printed, one at Ingolstadt 1489, and the other at Luneburg 1493.

to the Bible, to the Christian Fathers, etc., as well as for his valuable notes. In 1833, Chevalier Gregory published his edition, but as it is founded on the Codex de Advocatis (a bad text), it has no critical value. Of editions since then, the best are those of Liebner in 1848, of Vert in 1856, of Mooren in 1858, and lastly that of Hirsche, which follows the text of the Kempis MS. of 1441, and which was published in 1874. Backer quotes 545 editions of the Latin; but there are, of course, many more, as besides reprints of the editions quoted there are many editions the editors of which are unknown. The latest edition is one by Gerhard (1889), in which there is after each chapter a *consideratio*, which is based on the other works of Thomas à Kempis. The work is posthumous, and the editor did not live to see the result of his labours.

It is to France that we are indebted for the most beautiful editions. Under the patronage of Cardinal Richelieu there issued from the Imprimerie Royale, which was established by him, as its first production, an edition in folio, in 1640. Still finer was the edition which was produced by the Imprimerie Impériale, in 1855, for the Paris Exhibition of that

year. The text was magnificently printed, surrounded by miniatures, done by Mons. Steinheil, the smaller decorations being composed by Madame Toudouze. This is followed by Corneille's translation, revised by Mons. Victor Leclerc; the designs for the ornamentation of this were made by Mons. Gaucherel. Only one hundred and three copies were printed. The first and second, which were not numbered, were presented to the Emperor Napoleon III. and the Empress Eugénie. Of the others Nos. 3 to 73 were retained by the Emperor, for presents, the rest were disposed of among the public, four thousand francs being asked for a copy. In 1858 a miniature edition was printed, with H. Didot's microscopic type, and published by Mons. Trosse, and in 1862 another by Mons. Mame, of Tours. The other *éditions de luxe* published in France will be noticed among the translations.

To Holland must be credited the beautifully printed Elzevir editions, the first of which was published at Leyden, by J. and D. Elzevir, in 1652, 3, or 4. It has an engraved frontispiece, and is rather scarce. Another with a different frontispiece appeared in 1658, which was reprinted at Amsterdam in 1679.

We have not had many critical editions in this country. Rosweyde's edition was reprinted in Edinburgh, by Ruddiman. Charles Butler, of Lincoln's Inn, published an edition in 1827, to which was prefixed a life of the author; it was reprinted in 1851. Pickering's edition, 1851, is nicely printed, but the text being from the *Advocatis* MS. is not good; an edition by Benham was issued in 1874. Castalio's Latin paraphrase was reprinted in Cambridge, in 1685 and 1688, and at Oxford in 1848.

We must also give the palm to France for translations, both for their numerical superiority and for beauty of execution. The first was by Lambert, and published at Toulouse, in 1488, the authorship being attributed to Gerson; though in another edition about the same date the work is said to be composed by St. Bernard, or other devout person. There were issued re-impresions of Lambert's edition in 1493 and 1494. In the 1493 edition, a copy of which has been offered for sale for £84, it is expressly stated that the writer was "a venerable father, and a very devout Canon Regular living in his time in the regular observance of the rule of St. Augustine, Brother Thomas à Kempis." There was an edition of the

free translation known as the *Internal Consolation*, printed at Rouen in 1498.

Bellere, an Antwerp printer, published a translation in 1565; in the next fifty years six other translations appeared. In 1621, Michel de Marillac, Chancellor and Garde des Sceaux, brought out a translation, which is still considered one of the best; he was at first in favour of Gerson, but was finally convinced that the work was by A Kempis. Editions appeared in 1626, 1630, and 1631. It was this translation which was chosen for the magnificent edition published by Mons. Curmer, in 1858. Each page was ornamented with a border in gilt and colours taken from the finest illuminated MSS. of the Middle Ages, accompanied by vignettes, all of which were fac-similes in chromo-lithography from the miniatures in illuminated copies of Missals, Books of Hours, etc. In 1641 appeared Girard's translation, of which over fifty editions were published before 1771. Twenty other translations were published between 1641 and 1712, when that of Gonnelieu's appeared. Though this translation is known as that of De Gonnelieu's, and has been so called in the later reprints, as his name was the only one on the title-page, it was really by Mons. J. Curson,

the publisher. The Abbé Gonnelieu added the meditations and prayers which have rendered this edition the most popular one; not only has it been constantly reprinted, but it is still in great demand. Sixteen other translations followed, until the appearance of Gence's in 1820, which was said by Montfaucon to be the best. De Genoude's, which appeared in 1821, is considered good, and so is that of La Mennais, which first appeared in 1824, and of which editions continue to be published; it probably has more poetic feeling than the others. Since then over a dozen translations have appeared, one of which is by Mons. Tamizey-Larroque, a great advocate of the Chancellor Gerson.

Of the *Internal Consolation* there have been about fifty editions; the best is that issued in the *Bibliothèque Elzeverienne*, edited by Moland and d'Héricault, 1856. It is called the first French version, and has an Introduction and Notes. One of the greatest of French poets, Pierre Corneille, thought so highly of the *Imitation* that he did his best to make a poetical translation of it, and as far as French poetry is suitable to render a faithful copy of such a work he has succeeded; in fact Mons. Leroy has

written a work, *Corneille et Gerson dans l'Imitation*, to show the beauties contained in it. This translation, on which he worked for thirty years, has gone through sixty editions, and has been republished in 1885 at Lille, in an edition of which only one hundred copies were printed; it is in 4to, with four plates, and beautifully illustrated borders. Another French poetical version was published in 1818. French prose is often as poetical as French poetry, and Lamennais' edition is, consequently, much admired for its style; and that is the translation which has been chosen by Messrs. Gruel-Engelmann, for a most beautiful edition which appeared in 1883. It is ornamented with designs in gold and colour taken from examples found in the most beautiful MSS. of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. It was edited by R. Engelmann, and cost five hundred francs for each copy.

There are over three hundred and seventy Italian translations, that by Filicaia being one of the best. The work was early translated into that language, for we find that nine translations were issued before 1510.

Though there have been many translations into German, the number is not

quite equal to the Italian. One of the earliest was published at Augsburg, in 1486; another appeared in 1505. The principal of the three hundred and forty or more translations are those of Gosner, Sailer, Krehl, Müller, Arnd, Silbert, Weigl, and Görres—a beautiful edition of that of the last-named appeared with illustrations by Ritter von Führich. Many of these translations have gone through several editions.

Of Flemish and Dutch translations there are at least one hundred and three. It was in the Netherlands that the first translations appeared, and there were more early ones there than elsewhere. An edition in Brabant Dutch, by Nic. van Winghe, was published in Antwerp, in 1610.

The best Dutch poetic translation, according to Joncbloet, the literary historian, is that by J. Bonckart, published at Amsterdam, 1663. There is another in Dutch verse by C. Boey, which appeared at the Hague about the same date.

Corneille's French translation of Books I., II., and III. was retranslated into Dutch poetry by a society: I. and II. in 1707 at Amsterdam, and III. at Rotterdam in 1730.

The *Imitation* has also been translated

into Arabic, Armenian, Basque, Bohemian, Breton, Chinese, Danish, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Illyrian, Icelandic, Japanese, Malay, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slavonic, Spanish, Swedish, Syriac, Tamil, Telogoo, Turkish, and Negro. There have been poetical versions, besides English and French, in Latin,—one of which, by Bebber, in Ovidian verse, appeared at Cologne, in 1742,—Italian, German, and Dutch.

There are also two polyglot editions,—one of which appeared in Sulzbach, in 1837,—in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, German, English, and Greek; also one at Lyons, in 1841, in French, Greek, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin by Montfaucon.

The first English translation was anonymous; the second was made from the French at the request of the mother of Henry VII., Margaret Countess of Richmond and Derby, who translated the fourth book, the three first having been done by Atkynson, whose translation is rather free, as he is said to have omitted some passages and altered others; it was printed by Godfrey in 1502. Other editions were issued by Wynkyn de Worde in 1503 and 1504, and by Pynson in 1503.

The next translation was by John Redman in 16mo, but we do not know its date—it was about 1540. Father Richard Whytford, Brigettine of Syon House, brought out a translation in 1556; it reads well, but is quaint; it was reprinted in 1872.

Ed. Hake's translation appeared in 1567. It is not of much value, as not only is it translated from Castalio's paraphrase, but the translator leaves out whatever he thinks "not good scripture."

Roger did much the same in his translation, which was first published in 1584, for we meet with such remarks as "What needs these words?" "Our merit! the Scripture is clean against our merits." It contained only the first three books, the *Soliloquy* being added as a fourth. This translation was however popular, partly, perhaps, from Scripture references having been added. Publishers of it were Denman, Middleton, and Short. Editions appeared in 1589, 1592, 1596, 1598, 1605, and 1636 in 8vo; also in 1592 and 1628 in 4to. Worthington calls it "a short paraphrase." In 1613 appeared the version of F. B. or B. F., whom Waterton says was Anthony Hoskins, of the Society of Jesus. It is very good, and has formed the basis of some of the later editions.

Mr. Waterton mentions an edition of Thomas Carre in 1624 ; he was confessor to the English nuns in Paris. W. Page's edition appeared in 1639, and was reprinted in 1677. Dr. John Worthington, Master of Jesus College and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, brought out one, under the title of the *Christian's Pattern*, in 1654. It must have met with great success, as it was reprinted in 1657, 1658, 1669, 1677, 1684, 1688, 1695, 1699, 1701, 1705, and 1722. Notwithstanding these numerous editions it is very scarce, and Mr. R. C. Christie had difficulty in procuring the copies he has so carefully catalogued for the Chetham Society.* The Rev. Luke Milburne tried to turn the work into poetry : his paraphrase appeared in 1694. Its character may be judged by the following lines :—

"What though I could with strange acuteness pry
Into the still mysterious Trinity ?
Only more woes would me at last surprise,
Should my proud soul for Thee that died for good
despise."

What this translator thought of the original, and what were his ideas of the

* "Bibliography of the Works written and edited by Dr. John Worthington, etc., compiled by Richard Copley Christie." (Chetham Society's Publications, N.S., XIII.)

duty of a translator, is thus expressed : "A sour kind of leaven runs through it, which I have endeavoured to purge out." The translation by Dean Stanhope, which first appeared in 1696, has been the most popular of any, having been reprinted in 1698, 1700, 1706, '8, '11, '14, '17, '21, '27, '33, '42, '59, '72, '79, '93, and 1809, and is the one chosen by Mr. Henry Morley for his edition. It is rather freely translated, having been taken from Castalio's version, but is in very good language, and hardly deserves the severe criticism of Payne and of Dibdin. The former says, "The sense of the original is utterly lost in the loose paraphrase of Dean Stanhope :" and the latter, "Loose and paraphrastic, not to say faithless." Dean Stanhope may have expanded his text, but it was suitable to the time, as the number of editions prove.

In 1710 appeared Hickes's translation, which is valuable for the interesting preface, in which a fair description of the claims of the various candidates for the honour of the authorship is given.

The learned nonjuror Robert Nelson issued a translation in 1715,* and Willymot

* The British Museum does not possess a copy of this, which is called *The Christian's Pattern*. Nelson also published a translation of a selection of Thomas's other works, called *The Christian's Exercise*.

in 1722 published a translation of this as well as of the other works of Thomas. The next important translation was that of "R. C." (or Bishop Richard Challoner), in 1737, other editions of which appeared in 1744, 1800, 1814, and 1833. It is also rather free, but reads well, as may be judged from the following :—"Sublime words make not a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him dear to God." John Wesley brought out his translation in 1735, which is good, and tolerably close to the original; G. Smith his in 1738, and Lee his in 1760.

Payne's translation appeared in 1763; it was adopted for Dibdin's edition, which appeared in 1822. All these translations have the long sentences and Addisonian language of their period, which is hardly the style best suited to the *Imitation*.

There are other translations, such as those of Keith in 1774, and Goodwin in 1860; Benham's, 1874, which was reprinted with etchings in 1886; and Hutchins', 1887. We welcomed lately three excellent translations. One by "J. E." based on the translation of "F. B." revised and punctuated in accordance with Hirsche's edition, published by the Christian Knowledge Society in 1888. Both by its arrangement and punctuation it surpasses all previous

English translations. Another has been lately published, in 1889, by Mr. Elliot Stock, in which the translator has arranged the lines as poetry, being punctuated as in the 1441 Codex, and given the title *Musica Ecclesiastica* accordingly. It will give many a better idea of the original, and it forms an excellent book of devotion. The third is a translation in verse by Dean Carrington; it is a great improvement on Milburne's version, and it is wonderful how well and concisely the translator has followed the original. There was the first volume of a translation in verse by a Miss Thomson in 12mo, which appeared in 1868. We cannot help thinking, however, that more is lost than gained by a poetical version, a terse prose one suiting the original much better.





CHAPTER XI.

OPINIONS OF AUTHORS ON THE *IMITATION.*

"Why one has less, another more;
Not ours to question this, but Thine
With Whom each man's deserts are strictly
watched.

Wherefore, Lord God, I think it a great blessing
Not to have much which outwardly seems worth
praise or glory—as men judge of them."—
Imit. III. 22.

ROM what we know of the life
of Thomas à Kempis we per-
ceive him to have been filled
with the spirit of charity, and
that is the spirit which pervades the *Imita-
tion*; so that, although the book may at
times appear to be too ascetic, it possesses
in general that true catholicity which
appeals to all, whatever may be the reli-
gion they profess. We accordingly find
that it is appreciated by Positivists like
Comte and George Eliot, as well as by

those of the Christian faith. Every nation does it honour. In our country Sir Thomas More, Wesley, Johnson, Dibdin, and General Gordon are among its many admirers. In France, philosophers like Caro ; scholars like Renan ; theologians like Lamennais, Bossuet, and Massillon ; poets like Corneille and Lamartine ; historians like Michelet and Henri Martin ; critics such as La Harpe, Ste. Beuve, and Villemain,—all bring their tribute of praise. Ignatius Loyola speaks for Spain, Bellarmine for Italy, and Leibnitz for Germany. Even from Japan a voice reaches us in the form of an indulgence offered by Pope Sixtus V. to him who will read a chapter of it written in a Japanese translation. We here offer a few of the most important of the opinions that have been expressed.

The writer whose opinion is most generally quoted is Fontenelle, who said that the *Imitation* was "the finest book ever issued from the hand of man," the Gospels being Divine. Comte, the founder of the Positive philosophy, writes : "It is an inextinguishable treasure of true wisdom," adding that the "poem of the *Imitation* had been" to him "for years one of the principal daily sources of nourishment and consolation to my

soul." Another French philosopher, but a Christian, Mons. Caro, thus writes :— "Open the *Imitation* after having read the *De Officiis* of Cicero or the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, and you will feel yourself transported into another world as in a moment. You will be made to feel that you have, however, to penetrate a degree more into the living centre, impenetrable to the senses or to the conscience, and feel at once in the presence of God. Other great thinkers were unable to take this step, which is to die to oneself, to be born again to God." St. François de Sales says that "its Author is the Holy Spirit." Mons. de Sacy is a biblical scholar and Orientalist of some standing, and he gives his opinion that "it speaks to all souls. . . . As one reads it, conviction glides into the soul with a sentiment of peace and of inexpressible happiness." Father Lamennais left the Church, but his writings testify to his deep religious feeling. He writes that "the *Imitation* has made more saints than all the books of controversy. The more one reads the more one marvels. There is something celestial in the simplicity of this wonderful book. One would almost imagine that it was by one of those pure spirits who have seen God face to face, who had come expressly to explain

His ways and to reveal His secrets. One is profoundly moved at this aspect of that soft light which nourishes the soul, and fortifies and animates without troubling it." Michelet, besides being an historian, had the poetical imagination in a high degree ; he thus writes of the effect the work must have produced when it first appeared. He had just been depicting the misery of the people during that time of wars and troubles, when he writes :— "What must have been the emotions of the people, of the women, of the unfortunate (everybody was unfortunate then), when for the first time they heard the Divine Word, not in the language of the dead, but as a word that lived, not as a ceremonial formula, but as a living word from the heart ; they heard, as it were, their own voice, the marvellous manifestation of their own secret thoughts. This was indeed a resurrection ; humanity raised its head ; it loved, and it wished to live. 'I shall not die, but live, and shall yet see the works of the Lord.'"

Henri Martin, another French historian, says :—"This book has not grown old, and never will grow old, because it is the expression of the eternal tenderness of the soul. It has been the consolation of thousands—one might say of millions—of souls."

Another French historian, though more famous as a poet, has shown the soothing influence of the *Imitation* on one oppressed with trouble. Mons. de Lamartine thus writes in his *Jocelyn* :—

“Harassed by an inward strife,
I find in th' *Imitation* a new life—
Book obscure, unhonoured, like to potter's clay,
Yet rich in Gospel truths as flowers in May.
Where loftiest wisdom, human and Divine,
Peace to the troubled soul to speak, combine.” *

And in his *Entretiens Familiers*, xxii. 2, he says of this “Poem of the Soul” that it “condenses in a few pages the practical philosophy of men of all climates and of all countries who have sought, have suffered, studied, and prayed in their tears, ever since flesh suffered and thought reflected.”

Another writer of some eminence in the last century, J. F. de la Harpe, a dramatist as well as a critic, whose *Cours de Littérature* met with great success, was a thorough man of the world, and an atheist, but when trouble came he received in his prison comfort and consolation from the *Imitation*. “Never before,” he writes, “or since, have I experienced emotion so violent and yet so unexpectedly sweet—the words, ‘Be-

* Anstruther's translation.

hold, I am here,' echoing unceasingly in my heart, awakening its faculties, and moving it to the uttermost depths." He had already "studied attentively the Gospels, the Psalms, and other spiritual works," by which his faith had been revived; but he was still without comfort until he took the *Imitation*—having heard that in this admirable "book are to be found clear answers to all difficulties which can agitate the soul"—when he came across a quotation from 1 Sam. iii., where the young prophet says, "Here am I, for Thou hast called me."

One would hardly expect a favourable opinion of the work from such a combative Ultramontane as Mons. Louis Veuillot, and yet we find him saying, "To teach man that life in God, that is, the Christian life, is the only reasonable one, the only happy one, the only practical one, I would willingly say the only possible one, and that at length man is made thus to live, is the aim of the author and the secret he teaches."

Ampère, the physicist, had a great regard for the work, saying on his death-bed that he knew it thoroughly.

Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, thought so highly of the book that he daily read two chapters of it.

François de Sales recommended the reading of it.

The learned Benedictine, Dom Mabillon, editor of the *Acta Sanctorum*, etc., valued it very highly, saying that "this book is, without contradiction, the most estimable on matters of piety which has ever been made."

When we turn to Germany we find the same consensus of opinion. The great philosopher Leibnitz was so enamoured of it that he says, "The *Imitation* is one of the most excellent treatises that have ever been written," adding, "Blessed is he who lives according to this book, and is not content merely with admiring it." Ullmann, the German divine, author of the *Reformers before the Reformation*, etc., styles it "the most impressive preacher, the attracting magnet to countless multitudes." Pastor Veit calls it "the balm of suffering hearts." Paul Gerock, hymn-writer and preacher, calls it "a blessed treasury for the edification of spirit and of heart." Dr. Moritz Schwalb says it is his favourite book of edification, in reality his only one. "It quickens my mind as no other can, and gives me rich food for thought." Although a Protestant, he calls the fourth book a noble Communion book, with which even a pious Zwinglian could

prepare himself for Communion, as well as a pious Catholic, considering that "the Zwinglian doctrine, if read in the light of such meditations, is not in opposition to the Catholic doctrine, but merely its prose translation." George Pirckheimer, who wrote about Thomas à Kempis, whom he calls "that most wise, most sweet, and most religious man," was the prior of a Carthusian house at Nüremberg, and edited his works in 1494. To encourage the publisher, and to show him that he was doing a good work, he thus writes:—"Nothing more holy, nothing more honourable, nothing more religious, nothing, lastly, more for the Christian commonweal, can you ever do than to take care that these books of Thomas à Kempis be made public; which, though hitherto not taken notice of, as fire hidden in the veins of a flint, may be very greatly useful and serviceable to the Christian Religion. . . . Whereas, the venerable Father Thomas of Kempen, not trusting to eloquence, but to truth, composed these works, whose style, though it flow meanly, as from a gentle spring, yet shines clearly with its own light and intrinsic lustre."* He has

* Introduction to Hickes's edition of *The Christian's Pattern*.

added more to the same effect. One can but wonder that such words were needed so soon after the death of Thomas.

Count Stolberg writes that Thomas's little book of the *Imitation of Christ* deserves to be the book of all those who truly love Truth and Love."

Bernhard, in his preface to his translation, says that it is "drawn immediately from the spring of living water which flows into Eternal Life."

One is surprised, however, to see how little it seems to be appreciated by the literary men of Germany of to-day. Of many that were asked to give their opinion of the hundred best books, only two mention it. One of them, Dr. Sepp of Munich, thinks it too Buddhistic; he, however, tells us that King Louis I. of Bavaria thought highly of it, and when asked what book he reckoned the best, replied that he valued the *Imitation* above all, and that he read it daily.

Dr. F. X. Kraus, the Christian antiquary, says he always takes three books with him when he travels—the Bible, the *Imitation*, and the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.

The late Emperor Frederick is said to have been fond of it.

We shall now see that England is not

behindhand with its praise of the *Imitation*. George Eliot shows her deep appreciation of the book in her *Mill on the Floss* (Book IV., chapter iii.), where she says that "it works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness. It is the chronicle of a solitary hidden anguish, struggle, trust, and triumph. . . . It remains a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother who ages ago felt and suffered and renounced . . . under the same silent far-off heavens and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

Another novelist, Charles Kingsley, calls it "the School of many a noble soul."

John Wesley, by publishing a translation, showed the great value he set on the work. He considers "the style of the treatise as the most plain, simple, and unadorned that can be conceived; yet such is the strength, the spirit, and weight of every sentiment that it is scarce possible, without injury to the sense, to add or diminish anything. The whole treatise is a complete and finished work, comprehending all that relates to Christ, perfect in all the principles of that internal worship with which alone we worship in spirit and in truth." He also says that "one

of the main uses of the book is that while it enforces the spiritual graces in all their extent, it lays open the spiritual enjoyment that springs from the cultivation or the revealing of the hidden charm which lies in godliness, and demonstrating the sure though secret alliance which obtains between the peace of heaven in the soul and patience under all the adversities of the path which leads to it."

Dr. Chalmers, the Scottish theologian, one of the leaders of the great revival of religion in Scotland in 1846, also brought out an edition of the *Imitation*, using Payne's translation. He speaks in his preface of "the simplicity of thought and style, remarkably clear and powerful;" adding that "a serious mind will never be satiated with it, though it were read a thousand times over; for these general principles are as fruitful seeds of meditation, and the stores they contain can never be exhausted."

Hallam speaks of the sentences as "heart-piercing," and the expression as "concise and energetic."

Sir James Stephen speaks of it as a work "which could not fail to attract notice, and which commended itself to all souls driven to despair."

Most people will acknowledge that Dr.

Samuel Johnson was a good critic, and he says that "*Thomas à Kempis* must be a good book, as the world has opened its arms to receive it ;" he confesses that he was struck with this sentence in it, "Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be."

Whatever may be thought of Matthew Arnold's religious views, few will doubt the general correctness of his criticism and his knowledge of a good style, and he calls the *Imitation* "the most exquisite document after those of the New Testament of all that the Christian spirit has ever inspired."* Of some of the sayings of which he gives specimens he says, "These are moral precepts, and precepts of the best kind. As rules to hold possession of our conduct, and to keep us in the right course through outward troubles and inward perplexity, they are equal to the best ever furnished by the great masters of morals—Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius."

The late Dean Church, in his *Discipline of the Christian Character*, says that "it springs forth out of the depths of the heart, . . . and except the New Testament, no book

* *Essays on Criticism*, p. 270.

of religious thought has been used so widely or so long. . . . No book of human composition has been the companion of so many serious hours, has been prized in widely different religious communions, has nerved and comforted so many and such different minds—preacher and soldier and solitary thinker—Christian, or even, it may be, one unable to believe."

Another Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Milman, in his *Latin Christianity* (vol. ix., pp. 161-2), treats the subject historically, as follows:—"In one remarkable book was gathered and concentrated all that was elevating, passionate, profoundly pious in all the older mystics. Gerson, Ruysbroek, Tauler—all who address the heart in later times, were summed up and brought into one circle of light and heat in this single small volume. That this book supplies some imperious want in the Christianity of mankind, that it supplied it with a fulness and felicity which left nothing at this period of Christianity to be desired, its boundless popularity is the one unanswerable testimony. . . . The size of the book, the manner, the style, the arrangement, as well as the profound sympathy with all the religious feelings, wants, and passions, its vivid and natural expressions to monastic Christi-

anity, what our Hebrew Psalms are to common Christianity, its contagious piety, all conspired to its universal dissemination, its universal use. This one little volume contained in its few pages the whole essence of St. Victor, of Bonaventura without his Franciscan peculiarities, and of the later mystic school. Yet it might easily be held in the hand, carried about where no other book was carried—in the narrow cell or chamber, or on a journey into the solitude, or among the crowd and throng of men. Its name ; its short quivering sentences, which went at once to the heart, and laid hold of and clung tenaciously to the memory with the compressive incompleteness of proverbs ; its axioms, each of which suggested endless thoughts ; its imagery, scriptural language, were alike original and unique. The style is Ecclesiastical Latin, but the perfection of Ecclesiastical Latin—brief and pregnant as expressing profound thoughts in fervent words, and those words, if compared with the Scholastic Latin, of pure and of sound construction."

De Quincey seems to have been of the same opinion, as he says of this work : "Next to the Bible in European publicity and currency, the book came forward as an answer to the sighing of Christian

Europe for light from heaven." The same thought is expressed with much the same sentiment by Archdeacon Farrar when he writes : "The compiler of this book did but gather in one rich casket the religious yearnings, the interior consolation, the wisdom of solitary experience which had been wrung from many ages of Christian life ;" and again as "the expression of the loftiest individual genius, or as like unto some sacred goblet in which had been crushed the rich cluster of the wisdom of centuries."

In a translation published in 1633, the translator speaks of it "as so full of sweet sense of the Divine flower that the most spiritual bees may daily draw from it great plenty of celestial honey. It is a dish so Divine that it never satiates the devout mind. It covereth the soul with the rich garment of grace. It adorneth it with the splendiferous pearls of evangelical perfection." According to Dean Plumptre, Bishop Ken had a copy in his library, and both he and Archbishop Leighton recommended both it and the other works of Thomas à Kempis. The late Dr. Liddon was a great admirer of the work. He not only wrote a preface to an edition of it, but mentions it in his sermons "as the product of the highest Christian genius,"

and as among "the very choicest of devotional works." He also says it is one of the books "that have touched the heart of the world."

The Rev. R. F. Horton, one of the chief preachers of the Congregationalists, writes that "the lasting power of the *Imitatio* is derived from the fact that it is the inward Christ with whom it is dealing all along, and the life lived in the flesh is regarded merely as a more or less fragmentary illustration of that supernatural and eternal life." He thinks that it never contemplates the human side of Christ divorced from His "unique and Divine existence, and then gives the fullest and most fruitful aspect of the truth."

We are told that the *Imitation* was the constant companion of General Gordon ; and Lord Wolseley "has always carried when in the field *The Book of Common Prayer*, *Thomas à Kempis*, and *The Soldier's Pocket Book*." Mr. H. M. Stanley, the African traveller, thinks that "the Bible, Matthew Henry's or Barnes's Commentaries on it, and the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, are all-sufficient for a healthy and simple theology."

Sir John Lubbock has included this work in his list of the hundred best books ; and in answer to the request of the Editor

of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, several persons gave their opinions on the subject ; while Mr. Ruskin marked out the *Imitation* as needless, Archdeacon Farrar, whose opinion we have previously quoted, wrote that “if all the books of the world were in a blaze, the first twelve I should snatch from the flames would be the Bible, *The Imitation Christi*, *Homer*, *Æschylus*, *Thucydides*, *Tacitus*, *Virgil*, *Marcus Aurelius*, *Dante*, *Shakespeare*, *Milton*, and *Wordsworth*. The Rev. Dr. J. E. C. Welldon, the Head-master of Harrow, included the *Imitation* in his list ; and among those who, by approving of Sir John’s list, may be said to value that work are Dr. E. Warre, the Head-master of Eton, the Lord Chief Justice, Rev. D. Greene, Professor Jowett, and the Duke of Argyll.

When Dr. Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle, was Dean of Ely, he published a translation, in the preface to which he expressed the wish, in which we join, that this “wonderful little book may carry on the blessed work of comforting faithful souls, which by God’s grace it has already been permitted in so pre-eminent a degree to perform.”

One of the latest translations in Germany is edited by Dr. E. Fromm, and in his preface he speaks of it in the words of

Pascal, "One expects only a book and finds a man," adding that in it "the deep pious feeling expressed, the earnestness, the modesty, the unartificial piety of the author, come out in every sentence like the silvery sound of inward genuineness." He tells us that Karl Simrock, the poet, translated the work into verse, though he never ventured to publish it.





CHAPTER XII.

CHRESTOMATHY OF EXTRACTS FROM THE *IMITATION.*

IHE following selection of extracts will give the reader an idea of the riches to be found in the *Imitation*. They are in the words of the various translators in chronological order :—

“ Our lorde saith he that foloweth me goith not in darkenesse.”—I. 1, *Cambridge MS.*

“ Who euere wol understande ye wordes of crist plainly and sauereley, he must studie to conforme all his lif to his lyf.”—*Ibid., Dublin MS., about 1450-(80)?*

“ Vanij (*sic*) hit is to desire a longe lijve and take none heede of a goode lyue. Vanijte hit is a man to take heede onely to his presente lijve and not to see bifore þoo þinges þat are to come. Vanite hit is to loue þat þinge þat passeth aweij with alle maner of swyftenesse And not to haste thider where Joyes abyden everlastynge.”—*Ibid., Cambridge MS.*

“ How many ben ther that perrishith in this worlde by veyn konnyng, that litel retchith of the service of God.”—I. 3, *Dublin MS.*

" If man had knowlege of all thinges in the worlde without charite, what shulde it avayle him in the syght of God that jugeth man after his dedis."—I. 2, *Atkynson*, 1502.

" Remēbre yf thou knowe many thynge & exceedest othere in conning. Yet consider there be many mo thinges that thou art ignoraunt of."—*Ibid.*

" If thou wylt profitablye knowe and lerne, desire to be unknowē."—*Ibid.*

" It is a great wysdome and pfeccyō to haue of thysylfe lytel confidence and estymate wel of other."—*Ibid.*

" What auayleth us for to labour bisely for the knowlege of those thynge whiche shalle naither helpe us yf we knowe theym nor disavaūtage us, yf we therin be ignoraunt at the day of jugement."—I. 3, *Ibid.*

" The humble knowlege of thysylfe is a more sure way to heuē than the car' inq̄sitiō of pfoūde knowlege of thiges unprofitable."—*Ibid.*

" That psone may be named gret i grace that is incended with charyte & i pfytlī, obedient by humlyte, cōteynyng, the iordinate desire of pemynens or of dignyte."—*Ibid.*

" That psone is verely wel taughte that euer inforseth hymselfe to forsake hys owne wyll and folowe the wyl of God."—*Ibid.*

" A good lyl maketh a man wise to God, and instructeth him in many things that a sinful man shall never feel nor know."—I. 4, *Whytford*, 1556.

" Charity is to be sought in Holy Scripture, not eloquence. And it should be read with the same spirit that it was first made."—I. 5, *Ibid.*

" He is vain that putteth his trust in man or in any creature. Be not ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ, and to be poor in this world for His sake."—I. 7, *Ibid.*

"Open not thy heart to every person, but to him that is wise, secret, and dreading God."—I. 8, *Ibid.*

"An evil use and a negligence of our ghostly profit maketh us oftentimes to take little heed how we should speak."—I. 10, *Ibid.*

"We might have much peace, if we would not meddle with other men's sayings and doings, that belong not unto us."—I. 11, *Ibid.*

"If we set the end and perfection of our religion in these outward observances, our devotion will soon be ended."—*Ibid.*

"If thou shalt not conquer small and trifling things, when wilt thou be able to vanquish and subdue the harder things? First of all resist thine own inclination and forsake naughty custom, lest perhaps it lead thee by little and little into greater difficulty and hardness. Would to God thou wouldest mark both how great peace thou shouldst cause unto thyself and joy unto others in behaving thyself godly. Out of doubt thou wouldest then be more carefull to come forward in ghostly things."—I. 11, *Hake*, 1568.

"It is profitable for us to be kept down with calamities and adversities sometimes, because they oftentimes do call back a man unto himself, whereby he may know that he liveth here in banishment, and may not put his hope and affiance in any worldly things."—I. 12, *Ibid.*

"Therefore ought man so wholely to depend upon God, that it be not necessary for him to seek many comforts."—*Ibid.*

"It is good for us sometimes to suffer affliction, for it maketh us to know ourselves in this world and to repose no confidence in any creature."—I. 12, *Rogers*, 1584.

"As fire trieth iron so temptation trieth man. What we are able to do we know not many times; but what we are temptation shows."—I. 13, *Ibid.*

"If thou have not love, thine outward deeds profit nothing. If thou have love, be thy work never so small and simple, they profit much. For God respecteth not what is done, but how and with what affection a thing is done."—I. 15, *Ibid.*

"He doth much that loveth much, he doth much that doeth a thing as it should be done. A man endued with perfect charity serveth not his own turn, but onely seeketh the glorie of God."—*Ibid.*

"That which thou canst not amend neither thyself nor others, must patiently be suffered til God otherwise work."—I. 16, *Ibid.*

"Endeavour to be patient in bearing with the defects and infirmities of others; for that thyself also hast many things which must be suffered by others."—I. 16, *F. B., 1633.*

"We ought to bear with one another, comfort one another, help, instruct, and admonish one another."—*Ibid.*

"Thou must learn to break thy own will in many things if thou wilt have peace & concord with others."—I. 17, *Ibid.*

"Thou shouldest always so order thy thoughts & thy actions as if this very day thou wert to depart this life. If thou hadst a good conscience thou wouldest not much fear death."—I. 23, *Ibid.*

"Blessed is he that hath always before his eyes the hour of his death, and disposeth himself daily thereto."—*Ibid.*

"Labour to live in such sort, that at the hour of death thou mayest rather rejoice than fear."—*Ibid.*

"All is vanity but to love God and only to serve Him; and he that loveth God with his whole heart, needeth to fear neither death, punishment, judgement, nor hell, for perfect love gives secure access to God."—I. 24, *Ibid.*

"Be careful to avoid those things in thyself, which most displease thee in others."—I. 25, *Ibid.*

"Remember always the end, and how that time lost never returns."—*Ibid.*

"Put thy whole trust and confidence in God, love Him for His mercy, fear Him for His judgement, He will answer for thee and will do all things for the best."—II. 2, *F. Page*, 1639.

"A passionate man turneth good into evil and easily believeth the worst; a good quiet man turneth all things into good; he that is peaceable is not suspicious of any."—II. 3, *Ibid.*

"If in thy own heart thou art good and pure then wouldest thou be able to see and understand all things without any let or impediment; a pure heart pierceth heaven and hell."—II. 4, *Ibid.*

"Account nothing great, nothing high, nothing grateful, nothing acceptable, but God alone, or that which is from God."—II. 5, *Ibid.*

"Love him and keep him for thy friend, who when all go away, will not forsake thee nor suffer thee to perish in the end."—II. 8, *Ibid.*

"Give unto God that which is God's, and ascribe unto thyself that which is thine own; that is, give thanks unto God for His grace, and acknowledge that nothing is to be attributed to thee, but only sin and the punishment due thereto."—II. 10, *Ibid.*

"Content thyself and desire always the meanest and lowest things, and the highest shall be given thee, for the highest stand not without the lowest."—*Ibid.*

"How close on Jesus for the loaves they wait,
But all thoughts of sufferings hate.

Gladly His helpful Miracles admire,

To loud Applauses and Hosannas rise.

But from the shameful Cross retire,

With daunted Hearts and lowring Eyes."

II. 11, *Milbourne*, 1697.

“ O may I then, while living, daily die
 To sin, to earth, and to myself, that I
 May fill my heart with things above.
 So may my God accept my happier choice
 To die with Christ, not with the world rejoice,
 And thence approve my sacred love.”

II. 12, *Ibid.*

“ Love is great and powerful, an excellent Virtue
 and mighty Advantage in welldoing. It lightens
 the heaviest burdens, makes Difficulties easy, and
 smooths the rugged Ways of Duty ; takes out the
 Bitterness of Suffering, and gives them a delight-
 full relish.”—III. 5 (6), *Stanhope*, 1698.

“ In Love is the perfection of pleasure and
 strength, it is higher than heaven, broader than
 the sea, it fills the spacious universe, for it is born
 of God. The first and best of all His creatures,
 and as it came from Him, so it never rests till it
 have got above all finite beings, and centres again
 in that only, that infinite good from whence it
 originally sprung.”—*Ibid.*

“ If Disasters or calamitous Accidents cool or
 draw off our Affections, this is an Argument that a
 man is not yet what the Apostle requires we should
 all be, *Rooted and grounded in Love.*”—*Ibid.*

“ A valiant lover stands firm amidst trials and
 temptations, and hearkens not to the crafty insinua-
 tions of the enemy.”—III. 6, *Willymot*, 1722.

“ Strive like a good soldier ; and if at any time
 thou faldest through frailty, rally thy forces again,
 redouble thy vigour, not doubting of larger re-
 cruits of grace from Me.”—*Ibid.*

“ A moderate degree of knowledge, and a small
 capacity accompanied with humility, is preferable
 to vast treasures of learning, attended with vanity
 and self-conceit.”—*Ibid.*

“ Regard everything as derived and flowing
 from the first and sovereign good.”—III. 9, *Ibid.*

"Out of Me the little and the great, the poor and the rich, draw as from a living fountain the water of life."—*Ibid.*

"If My grace, together with true charity, once enter the heart, there will be no more envy, nor narrowness of spirit nor self-love."—*Ibid.*

"Lord, how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness which Thou hast reserved for those who fear Thee! But yet Thou art something more to those who love Thee with their whole heart."—III. 10, *Anon.*, 1726.

"It is good sometimes to hold the reins, and use moderation even in good endeavours and desires; but too much eagerness should cause distraction in the mind; and lest want of method should be of ill example to others."—III. 11, *Ibid.*

"Grant that I may ever desire and wish for such things as are most acceptable and most agreeable to Thee. May I have no other will but Thine; and that alone be my only measure, and the rule I most exactly follow."—III. 15, *Ibid.*

"Though thou hadst in thy possession all the advantage of this world together; yet thou couldest never be at ease, nor happy in anything, but the Creator of thee and them, in whom alone all felicity consists."—III. 16, *Ibid.*

"All human comfort is short and vain; and that only true which truth itself creates in our hearts."—*Ibid.*

"Thy care for me is greater than all the care that I can take for myself.

"For he standeth very totteringly that castest not his whole care upon Thee.

"Lord, so that my will may remain right and firm towards Thee, do with me whatsoever shall please Thee. For it cannot be but good whatsoever Thou doest with me."—III. 17, *Wesley*, 1735.

“O how many and great thanks am I bound to render to Thee, that Thou hast vouchsafed to show unto me and to all the faithful a direct and sure way to Thy everlasting kingdom !

“For Thy life is our way, and by holy patience we go with Thee that art the crown.”—III, 18, *Ibid.*

“How much better Thou disposest thyself to suffering, so much the more wisely thou doest, and so much the greater reward shalt thou receive.

“Thou shalt more easily also endure it, if, both in mind and by exercise, thou art well prepared thereunto.”—III. 19, *Ibid.*

“Rest thyself, my soul, in God upon all occasions, and make Him thy only dependence ; for He is thy only sure refuge, the eternal rest of the saints. Grant me Thy grace, O sweetest, kindest Saviour, to esteem and love and trust in Thee above all others.”—III. 21 (23), *Dr. G. Smith, 1738.*

“For Thou, O my God, art the best and most excellent Being. In Thee alone can we find plenty and fulness, sweet refreshment, peaceful comfort, and ravishing delights, the perfection of beauty and charming graces, true honour and adorable majesty. In Thee as its proper centre all good meets and dwells, and ever did, doth, and will continue to abide, for and to all eternity.”—*Ibid.*

“Draw me with the cords of an entire and holy affection. Set me at liberty from this clog of earth, and give me wings of fervent zeal and pure devotion, that I may soar aloft, and take my flight higher than heaven itself, and find my rest in Thee.”—*Ibid.*

“All the faculties of mind and body, all the endowment of nature, and all the advantages of grace are the gifts of thy Hand, and proclaim the Infinite love and munificence of the Giver, from

. whom all good eternal proceeds."—III. 22 (16),
Payne, 1763.

"He that hath received greater gifts hath no reason to glory in his own merit, nor to exalt himself above others, nor to insult his poorer brother who hath received less; for he is the greatest and best who ascribes least to himself, and is most devout and humble in the acknowledgment and praise of the Infinite Liberality from which every good and perfect gift proceeds."—*Ibid.*

"Nothing should give so much joy to the heart of him that truly loveth Thee, and is truly sensible of Thy undeserved mercies, as the perfect accomplishment of Thy blessed will."—*Ibid.*

"If thy love be pure, simple, and well ordered thou shalt be free from the bondage of things."—III. 27, *Keith, 1774.*

"Grant me prudently to avoid him that flatters me, and to suffer patiently him that contradicts me."—*Ibid.*

"He that coveteth not to please men, nor feareth to displease them, shall enjoy much peace."—III. 28, *Ibid.*

"Be firm and constant. Take courage and be patient, and comfort will come to thee in due time."—III. 30, *Ibid.*

"It is a vain and unprofitable thing to be grieved, or to rejoice for future things, that perhaps will never happen."—*Ibid.*

"Far more noble is that learning which flows from above from the Divine influence, than that which is painfully got by the industry of man."—III. 31, *Ibid.*

"Nature looks at the outward things of a man. Grace turneth herself to the inward."—*Ibid.*

"You cannot possess perfect liberty unless you completely deny yourself."—III. 32, *Goodwin, 1860.*

"Seek true peace, not on earth, but in heaven;

not in men, nor in any other creature, but in God alone."—III. 35, *Ibid.*

"Fear God, and you need not tremble at the terrors of men."—III. 36, *Ibid.*

"Flee into the hidden chamber of your own heart, and earnestly implore the Divine succour."—III. 38, *Ibid.*

"Men often strive vehemently for something upon which they have set their hearts; but when they attain it they find it different from what they expected."—III. 39, *Ibid.*

"If you rest upon the ever-living and abiding Truth, the loss or death of a friend will not overwhelm you with grief. Friendship ought to have its foundation in Me, and whosoever appears good to you and is dear to you in this life is to be loved for My sake."—III. 42, *Ibid.*

"Learn in all things to conquer thyself for thy Creator's sake; then shalt thou be able to attain unto Divine knowledge."—III. 42, *Benham, 1874.*

"I am He who in an instant lifts up the humble spirit to learn more reasonings of the eternal truth than if a man had studied ten years in the schools."—III. 43, *Ibid.*

"The voice of books is one, but it informeth not all alike, because I inwardly am the Teacher of truth, the Searcher of the heart, the Discerner of the thought, the Mover of actions, distributing to each man as I judge meet."—*Ibid.*

"It is more profitable to turn away thine eyes from those things that displease, and to leave to each man his own opinion, than to give thyself to discourses of strife."—III. 44, *Ibid.*

"A Friend who continueth faithful in all the distresses of his friend is rare to be found. Thou, O Lord, Thou alone, art most faithful in all things, and there is none other like unto Thee."—III. 45, *Ibid.*

"What I do not like to bear from others, I ought myself in every way to avoid."—III. 45, *Hutchings*, 1887.

"Regard My words, and you will not care for ten thousand words of men."—III. 46, *Ibid.*

"Do not seek what is pleasant and profitable to yourself, but what is acceptable to Me and honours Me."—III. 49, *Ibid.*

"Be strong and courageous, as well in doing as in suffering things from which nature shrinks."—*Ibid.*

"What you do for others shall have success, what you undertake to please yourself shall fail."—*Ibid.*

"This must be your desire, that God may be always glorified in you whether by life or death."—*Ibid.*

"When men judge according to their senses they often err; and the lovers of the world, by loving visible things only, are deceived."—III. 50, *Ibid.*

"Humble contrition for sins is an acceptable sacrifice unto Thee, O Lord, yielding a far sweeter savour in Thy presence than the perfuming frankincense."—III. 52, *J. E.*, 1888.

"Oh, how great a confidence shall he have at the hour of death, whom no affection to anything detaineth in the world."—III. 53, *Ibid.*

"If thou perfectly overcome thyself, thou shalt with more ease subdue the rest. The perfect victory is to triumph over ourselves. For he that keepeth himself subject in such sort, that his sensuality be obedient to reason, and reason in all things obedient to Me, he is truly conqueror of himself and lord of the world."—*Ibid.*

"When this evil (selfishness) is once overcome and subdued, there will presently ensue great peace and tranquillity."—*Ibid.*

“The life of man* shuns death, shuns pressure,
 shuns defeat,
 Would not be second,
 Would not pass beneath a yoke.
 Life touched by God* aims at the humbling of
 self, even to death,
 Fights with self-indulgence,
 Asks for subjection,
 Wishes for defeat,
 Cares not for its own liberty,
 Loves to be bound by rule,
 Likes not to domineer,
 But ever under God
 To live, to stand, to be ;
 And for His sake is ready humbly to bow down
 To any human creature.
 The life of man works for its own end,
 And thinks, What can I gain from some one else ?
 Life touched by God cares not what serves or
 helps itself,
 But what will help mankind.”

III. 54, *Musica Ecclesiastica*, 1889.

“God must be blessed in all His gifts, it says,
 Who gives us all out of pure charity.”—*Ibid.*
 “Thy grace, O Lord, how greatly do I need
 In good works to begin, in them proceed,
 And rightly finish, for without Thine aid
 All efforts to do well are vainly made.”

III. 55, *Carrington*, 1889.

“O heavenly grace, without thee all we do
 Is worthless ; gifts of nature worthless too.”

Ibid.

“Faith, hope, and other virtues find not place
 In Thy regards, if lacking love and grace.”

Ibid.

* The translator chooses these terms as equivalent to “natura” and “gratia.”

"What countless virtues doth Thy grace combine,
Mistress of truth, teacher of discipline,
Light of the heart, sweet comforter of grief,
Sorrow's disperser, and benign relief."—*Ibid.*

"If thou keep in My way, Truth shalt thou see
And understand, and Truth shall make thee free,
And life eternal shall thy guerdon be."—*Ibid.*

"Defende and kepe ye soule of þy litel servant
among so many perels of þis corruptible lyf and
þy grace goying with, Dyrecte hym by þe wey of
pes to þe cuntrey of euerlasting clerenes. Amen."
—*Cambridge and Dublin MSS.*, about 1450.





CHAPTER XIII.

CHRESTOMATHY FROM THE OTHER WORKS OF THOMAS À KEMPIS.*



THE following extracts from the *Opera Minora* of Thomas are intended to show the similarity of ideas and the resemblance of style to sentences in the *Imitation* :—

“Seek true wisdom which Christ taught and showed by His example. The truly wise man hates iniquity, speaks the truth, and does justice.”—*Hortulus Rosarum*, III. 1.

“When anger enters the mind wisdom departs. . . . Blessed is the tongue of the prudent, because it heals the wounds of the angry one.”—*Ibid.*, IV. 2.

“Be diligent in doing good, patient in bearing evil, and you will be happy in your life in always praising God.”—*Ibid.*, V. 2.

* I have mentioned the *Soliloquy of the Soul* as one of the finest of the works of Thomas; it is full of the deepest piety, but hardly offers passages for extracts.

"He stands well and firmly who places his trust not in himself, nor in man, but in God."—*Ibid.*, V. 2.

"When you hear some one saying unworthy and hard words of you it is then given you to drink medicine for your soul out of the cup of the Lord."—*Ibid.*, VII. 1.

"If you wish to have peace and a good conscience preserve humility, patience, and obedience."—*Ibid.*, X.

"Virtue is not acquired without labour or a struggle, nor is it retained without caution."—*Ibid.*, XI. 2.

"He who does not pray does not fight, and he who does not fight and resist will soon be conquered, and lose his crown."—*Ibid.*, XII. 3.

"He who knows and reads many things, and does not act up to what he has known and learnt, departs hungry and empty from a good table."—*Ibid.*, XII. 5.

"The love of God and a good conscience delights and makes one joyful above all things."—*Ibid.*, XII. 6.

"Charity is a noble virtue which surpasses all virtues, all knowledge, and all gifts."—*Ibid.*, XIII. 1.

"As fire consumeth wood, so charity extinguishes vices."—*Ibid.*, XIII. 4.

"Charity is good will in the soul, which does not desist from doing good, although weakness or necessity does not permit it to do all the good which it intends."—*Ibid.*, XIII. 4.

"The love of Christ loosens all the chains of the world, and makes all burdens light."—*Ibid.*, XIII. 5.

"Contend bravely, pray fervently, labour diligently, study frequently, be silent willingly, and bear patiently."—*Ibid.*, XIV. 2.

"If you cannot conquer little things you will not be able to overcome more important ones."—*Ibid.*, XV. 2.

"Where there is peace and concord, there God and all good things; where strife and dissensione there the devil and all evil; where there is humility, there is wisdom. . . . Conquer pride, and you will find great peace. . . . Where there is agreement among brethren there is sweet melody; where there is charity there is the Holy Spirit. . . . It is delightful to hear good things, but it is more praiseworthy to labour worthily."—*Ibid.*, XVI. 2.

"The Royal way of coming unto Christ is to conquer one's will."—*Ibid.*, XVIII. 2.

"He is always wretched and in want, whatever he has, who has not God as his friend. He walks with God in the light who desires nothing of this world, but who has his heart fixed on God."—*Vallis Lil.*, VII. 1.

"You will not find rest unless you give your heart to God. Seek God above all things, and love Him thoroughly."—*Ibid.*, VII. 29.

"God attends rather to compunction of heart than the clamour of a loud voice."—*Ibid.*, X. 3.

"I do not wish a long life but a good one, for better is a good conscience than all the treasures of the world."—*Ibid.*, XIV. 1.

"Love, and you will be loved; because love mends all past evils, drives away sadness, and prepares the heart for joy such as the world knows not, which flesh cannot make you feel."—*Ibid.*, XXVI. 2.

"Let all the creatures be silent before Thee, if Thou shouldest speak alone to me. O Lord, be present, and enlighten me."—*Ibid.*, XXIX. 2.

"Who loves Christ has peace, and rests in Him, nor does it any more affect him what he should seek."—*Ibid.*, XXX. 1.

"Do not rashly judge one falling, because God can quickly raise him when he repents. Pray for all men, and commit all men to God."—*Ibid.*, XXXI. 4.

"Every burthen is light which charity delights to bear. Nor is any labour hard to him who is comforted by the bread of charity."—*De Tribus Tabernaculis*, I. 2.

"Beware of pride if you do not wish to suffer ruin."—*Ibid.*, II. 5.

"Solitude and silence help much to the purity of the heart."—*Ibid.*, V. 6.

"Whatever exceeds moderation and does not keep to discretion can neither please God nor last long."—*Ibid.*, IX. 2.

"As fire and water are contrary to one another, so the love of God and the love of the world do not agree together."—*Ibid.*, XI. 1.

"The way to charity is to descend by humility."—*Ibid.*

"He who has many things, will suffer much care from them. He who is contented with moderate things will have more peace."—*Hospitale Pauperum*, IV.

"This man has confidence in God, and does not fear to die, because God is his hope whom he is prepared to obey even to death."—*Ibid.*, V. 2.

"The arms of our warfare are not carnal from without, but spiritual gifts from within."—*Ibid.*, XVI. 2.

"If you do not wish to be deceived, be not delighted with foolish praises."—*Exer. Spir.*, II. 3.

"Solitude is the mother of devotion."—*Ibid.*, IV.

"He is strong who despises the world; he is stronger who conquers himself."—*Ibid.*, IV.

"It profits much to write out well a good and correct copy, and it delights much in it often being read. God says in the Gospel, Whoever

gives a cup of cold water to one that is thirsty shall not lose his reward. Much rather shall he who gives the living water of wisdom to one reading in the book written by the finger of God not lose his reward in heaven."—*Doctrinale Juvenum*, IV. 2.

"Woe to the clergyman unlearned and without the sacred books, who is often a cause of error to himself and to others. For a clergyman without the sacred books is like a soldier without arms, a horse without a bridle, a boat without oars, a writer without pens."—*Ibid.*, VII. 2.

"The best doctrine teaches us to pray humbly, and not to despair of the mercy of God."—*Ibid.*, X.

"There is nothing by which you can conquer better than by diligence in good work, in the study of the sacred Scripture, and in the use of frequent prayer."—*Ibid.*, X. 4.

"Love Him when He bestows good things, love Him when He takes them away, and when He afflicts you by sending tribulations. No adversity, no prosperity will separate the penitent heart from Him."—*De Solitudine*, 20.

"In general we all need to be silent more than to speak. Indeed there are few who are too slow to speak."—*De Silentio*, 28.

"Avoid being praised as poison, lest you should be led away, and should lose the reward of your good work. They are vain and foolish who delight in human praises."—*De Recogn. Propr. Fragilitatis*, II. 2.

"He who knows not how to be silent will not serve his friend long. When you have heard and learnt many things you will have learnt well if you can retain this, to know when to speak and when to be silent. May God give you this great gift, for it is truly a great gift, because few have it

to know when and how and to whom it is right to speak."—*Ibid.*, III.

"The love of the world soon departs, and leaves you empty in your need. You may have many friends in prosperity, but in adversity scarcely one will stay with you."—*Ibid.*, III. 2.

"Bear patiently and with longsuffering the defects of others whom God, who sees all things, bears."—*Ibid.*, IV. 1.

"He who always wishes to vindicate himself will have few friends. Evil will always displease, but the tolerance of evil will please."—*Ibid.*, IV. 1.

"He who trusts in God sustains all things patiently, and he who seeks God purely will be easily contented."—*Ibid.*, IV. 2.

"In God there is true joy of heart, but without God there is neither peace nor rest."—*Ibid.*, IV. 2.

"Nothing avails without if grace and virtue are wanting within."—*Ibid.*, VI.

"The Heavenly Father will give His good spirit to the soul seeking Him."—*Ibid.*, V. 2.

"He who gives an humble answer easily soothes an angry man. He indeed does a great thing who resigns himself, and conquers himself in all things on account of God. For he who is conqueror of himself is Lord of this world and the heir of heaven. He who does not conquer himself in little things, how will he overcome greater things?"—*Ibid.*, VI. 2.

"When truth and charity meet, then those things which are for peace and safety work equally together."—*Ibid.*, IX. 2.

"Beware of offending God. Beware of scandalizing your neighbour made in the image of God. Recall the wanderer, instruct the ignorant, give a good example, take away all cause of offence, return good for evil, and you will receive an eternal

prize and joy in the kingdom of heaven."—*Ibid.*, X. 2.

"Happy is he who does all his good works with a pure intention simply to the praise of God. Happy is he who at all times directs his heart to please God, and seeks nothing for his own private good."—*Ibid.*, XII. 1.

"We must not weary of always praying and devoutly thanking God, for He never ceases from doing good to us."—*Ibid.*, XIV. 2.

"Love solitude and silence, and you will find great quiet and a good conscience. For where there is a multitude there is often noise and a great distraction to the heart."—*Alphabet. Parvum.*

"Choose poverty and simplicity, and be content with few things, and you will not easily murmur."—*Ibid.*, 5.

"Always in the first place inquire about your work, whether it is pleasing to God or displeasing. Act not against your conscience either through fear or love. . . . Learn first to be silent rather than to speak, and be willing to be taught rather than to teach."—*Ibid.*, 15.

"No one is richer, no one is freer than he who gives himself and everything to God."—*Ibid.*, 20.

"He will be quickly learned and happy who humbly imitates Christ."—*De Humilitate*, 2.

"He forms a perverse judgment who thinks great things of himself and imagines worse of others."—*Ibid.*, 3.

"Humility is the precious root of virtues ; from it is produced the fruit of obedience, and ripens into charity. . . . Two humble persons agree well together ; two proud persons contend even for a worthless thing."—*Ibid.*, 4.

"He is truly humble whom the praise of men moves not."—*Ibid.*, 5.

"To seek advice is a sign of humility. God

often speaks through another what He does not reveal Himself to a man."—*Ibid.*, 6.

"Learn in all things to conquer yourself, and you will have peace within."—*Vita Boni Monachi*.

"Silence is the friend of solitude."—*Sermo*, I.

"It is necessary that humility should precede glory, and that patience should prepare the crown for the victors."—*Ibid.*, X.

"Whoever wishes to please God and edify his neighbour, should so guard all his words and manners, without and within, as if he was at once to be presented before God."—*Ibid.*, XIV. 7.

"Give me, O Lord, a fortunate hour of death, and to find a blessed rest with Thee."—*Concio*, XXII. 16.

"In every tribulation and temptation recur to prayer as to the safe door of your soul in imploring the Divine assistance; the quicker the better, the slower the worse. The oftener the more useful, the more fervently the more acceptable to God."—*Concio*, XXXII. 4.

"The knowledge above all knowledge is to know that we know nothing. Let us be so much the more humble in all things, as we are the farther from true perfection."—*Ibid.*, XXXVI. 1.

"The word of man passes, but the word of God remains eternal and unchangeable."—*De Elevacione Mentis*, III. 3.

"Peace with virtues is good, but with vices never, but always bad."—*De Disciplina Claust.*, XI. 2.

"He who is prepared to give a little when he has little, should not delay to give more when he is richer."—*De Fideli Dispens.*, I. 6.



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